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JANE AUSTEN

A FRENCH APPRECIATION

BY

LÉONIE VILLARD

Docteur ès lettres

Translated by VERONICA LUCAS

(from "*Jane Austen: sa vie et son œuvre*")

WITH

A NEW STUDY OF JANE AUSTEN

(interpreted through "*Love and Freindship*")

BY

R. BRIMLEY JOHNSON

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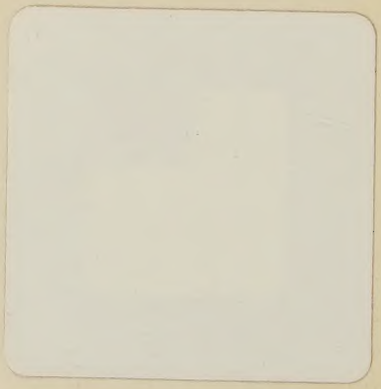

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By R. BRIMLEY JOHNSON

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NEW STUDY OF JANE AUSTEN

BY

BRIMLEY JOHNSON

COLLEGE

CHAPTER I

THE BIRTH OF GENIUS

IN my judgment the publication of that amazing riot of laughter, which is *Love and Friendship*, goes far to prove (what I always suspected to be the case) that the foundations of Jane Austen's genius were *not* realistic, but were built upon a close study of the conventions of romance. This priceless sheaf of imperishable delight does not directly lift the veil. There is in it no sensational revelation concerning the most reserved personality who ever won the homage of mankind. Only we know to-day, what should never have been in doubt, that beneath the fine balance and swift quiet of *Pride and Prejudice* there beat an untamed joy in glorious nonsense and the Shakespeare laugh.

Comparing this palace of marble wit—not built for strangers' eyes—with the published novels, we can detect the Birth, and the Growth, of her immortal art : as it developed from intellectual and witty criticism of fiction to the loving observation of human nature and the creation of *real* character. We can distinguish, also, between the fiction-types which she left unaltered (*i.e.*, inhuman) among her own creations ; and thereby disprove the charge of cynicism against her work. We can see how each of the novels has modified, more and more as they matured, the method and manner of her art, which, nevertheless, maintained its structure and its foundations to the last.

CHAPTER II

JANE AUSTEN—BOOK-LOVER

THERE have been two assumptions always made about Jane Austen—the foundation from which all criticism or appreciation have been established :—

1. That she was exceptionally modern in her realism ; an observer and showman, whose work was based on the study of human nature.

2. That no writer of equal genius ever owed so little to her predecessors ; knew or cared so little about books.

I believe that both assumptions are fundamentally untrue.

She wrote books because she loved books, and for no other reason. She did not study human nature, but loved men and women ; and her realism sprang from loyalty to her friends.

We say that English realism began with Samuel Richardson ; and this is, practically, correct. But his realism was not modern : that is, it did not mean that he worked only from life, was inspired by the determination to reveal human nature, was even primarily concerned with telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

It meant that, as a printer and bookseller, he had lived in a world of books, and, by some strange kink in his stiff and pedantic little mind, happened to notice

that heroes and heroines were not very much like real life. They were more aristocratic, too, than anyone he knew well; and, for these reasons, far less interesting than his own friends.

Therefore, having a pretty knack of using his pen, the good man set about solemnly *correcting* the novel, by comparing it with the life he knew and the characters he saw around him. His object was to improve the materials of his trade, not—primarily or even consciously—to tell the truth about life and men. Above all, being a moral man, he wrote with a purpose, but not for a purpose. He merely used his observation as a tool for the perfection of his art.

Defoe, in fact, is far nearer the moderns as a realist; but his methods have not taken root in English literature, and we certainly have no school of Defoe realism.

It is improbable that Richardson was influenced, even unconsciously, by the Father of the English novel; though *Pamela* might have kept his tales in the kitchen. On the other hand, Richardson's *corrective* realism, the deliberate sobering of romance, proved so instantly pleasing to English taste as to become practically universal. There is no need to labour the point of priority or influence between the authors of *Clarissa* and *Tom Jones*, with Tobias Smollet more or less behind both. The fact of historical importance is that this process of humanising the characters of fiction on the approved lines of dramatic story-telling, which yet remained a romance, continued to fill the libraries for many a year: certainly long after the days of Jane Austen.

Charlotte Brontë's fiery soul drove her to utter burning words on certain aspects of the "Woman's question"; George Eliot's varied religious experience

made her a preacher of ethics; Maria Edgeworth's stepmother prompted her to insert the educational pill. But the English novel remained substantially a work of art, and never pretended to be a "human document."

While all admit the artistry of Jane Austen's style, there has always been a natural, though not entirely wise, tendency to regard her as, with equal folly, men once looked on Shakespeare—

> Whose fruitful genius, happy wit,
> Was framed and finisht at a lucky hit,
> The pride of Nature, and the shame of Schools,
> Born to create, and not to learn from Rules;

to pity her, or to marvel at her, for the intellectual starvation of her life; and, finally, to estimate her work exclusively as a faithful and humorous picture, *an observation*, of her own circle in her own day. The confusion, or the mistake, has come from a failure to distinguish between criticism and taste. Whatever her family biographers may try to prove, Jane Austen was *not* a well-read woman—in the modern sense; nor a professional woman of letters like George Eliot. She never studied literature as such; and, in fact, lightly expressed her scorn of those who did; pointing her satire through Mary Bennett.

But, on the other hand, she lived for and among books, far more than Fanny Burney or Charlotte Brontë: to a large extent she even judged people in real life by their literary tastes. We read in one of her most delightful letters, dated September, 1796, of a certain Miss Fletcher: "There are two traits in her character which are pleasing—namely, she admires *Camilla*, and drinks no cream in her tea."

The Library at Pemberley had been "the work of many generations," and Mr. Darcy was "always buying

books." Ellinor's spirited defence of Edward's "reading aloud," against the romantic derision of her rapturous sister, is the defence of a book-lover. She "had heard his opinion on subjects of literature and taste," and could pronounce that "his mind was well-informed, his enjoyment of books exceedingly great, his imagination lively, his observation just and correct, and his taste delicate and pure."

But Marianne "*would* give him Cowper," and how could she "hear those beautiful lines, which had frequently almost driven her wild, pronounced with such impenetrable calmness, such dreadful indifference!" "It would have broke *my* heart, had I loved him, to hear him read with so little sensibility."

Though Brandon was over thirty, he "had read, and had a thinking mind"; while Marianne's first test of Willoughby was "to question him on the subject of books, when her favourite authors were brought forward and dwelt upon with rapturous delight . . . Their taste was strikingly alike. The same books, the same passages, were idolized by each . . . He read with all the sensibility and spirit which Edward had unfortunately wanted."

But, alas—they "never finished Hamlet"; and she would "read nothing but what they had been used to read together."

Had she a fortune, Marianne would buy "books!—Thomson, Cowper, Scott—she would buy them all over and over again; she would buy up every copy to prevent their falling into unworthy hands; and would have every book that tells her how to admire an old twisted tree—and the bulk of her fortune would be laid out in annuities on the authors or their heirs."

Benwick's tastes were similar. He had "a tolerable collection of well-bound volumes . . . considerable taste

in reading, though principally in Poetry," talked always "of Mr. Scott and Lord Byron," and even "turned Louisa into a person of literary taste." It had been: "Give him a book, and he will read all day"—mourning for *one* young lady; then he "sat at Louisa's elbow, reading verses, or whispering to her, all day long."

Anne, indeed, "ventured to hope that he did not always read only poetry . . . it was the misfortune of poetry to be seldom safely enjoyed by those who enjoyed it completely . . . the strong feelings which alone could estimate it truly were the very feelings which ought to taste it but sparingly." He had not only read, but "repeated, with tremulous feeling, various lines that imaged a broken heart, or a mind destroyed by wretchedness"; and she "had the hope of being of real use to him in some suggestions as to the duty and benefit of struggling against affliction, which had naturally grown out of their conversation."

Anne herself was supposed in the family to have refused Charles Musgrove because "he might not be learned and bookish enough," and she herself had "only knowledge enough of the language to translate at sight" certain "inverted, curtailed Italian lines into clear, comprehensible, elegant English."

From "fifteen to seventeen" Catherine Morland "read all such books as heroines must read"; and if Fanny Price learnt French and History from Miss Lee, it was the beloved Edmund who "recommended the books which charmed her leisure hours, encouraged her taste, and corrected her judgment."

The volatile Isabella devoured books—when she "had heard" that "something very shocking indeed" had "come out in London," from that "particular friend of hers," Miss Andrews, "one of the sweetest

creatures in the world," though there *was* "something amazingly insipid about her." While Henry Tilney himself was "proud" when he reflected upon the zeal with which he broke the "promise he made of reading" Udolpho aloud to his sister, refusing to wait "only five minutes," stealing "her own copy, particularly her own," and "finishing it in two days, his hair standing on end the whole time."

How much scorn we find, again, for those who do not love their book. Miss Bingley, you may remember, was easily "exhausted by the attempt to be amused with her own book, which she had only chosen because it was the second volume of Darcy's." Emma "supposes" that Mr. Martin "is not a man of information beyond the line of his own business. He does not read." But Harriet believes he "had read a good deal: the Agricultural Reports, and some other books that lay in one of the window-seats—but he reads all *them* to himself. But sometimes, of an evening, before we went to cards, he would read something aloud out of the 'Elegant Extracts,' very entertaining, and I know he has read the 'Vicar of Wakefield.' He never read the 'Romance of the Forest' nor the 'Children of the Abbey.'"

The poor man was so "busy" he quite "forgot" them—"He was a great deal too full of the market to think of anything else . . . just as it should be . . . What has he to do with books . . . *so very clownish, so totally without air!*"

We have already admired poor Willoughby's refined taste; and Henry Crawford's culture was far beyond reproach. Though "he did not think he had had a volume of Shakespeare in his hand since he was fifteen," he could "fall into the flow of his meaning immediately"; he "gave the sense," and was "truly dramatic."

"To *good* reading" Fanny had been long used; her uncle read well, her cousins all, Edmund very well, but in Mr. Crawford's reading there was a variety of excellence beyond what she had ever met with. The King, the Queen, Buckingham, Wolsey, Cromwell, all were given in turn; for with the happiest knack, the happiest power of jumping and guessing, he could always alight at will on the best scene, the best speeches of each; and whether it were dignity or pride, or tenderness or remorse, or whatever were to be expressed, he could do it with equal beauty." His conduct, indeed, was open to criticism; but he and Fanny *had* "moral and literary tastes in common."

Finally we have Miss Austen's own spirited defence of novel-writing (and reading) from the professional point of view: which takes two forms:—

"You never read novels, I dare say," remarked the innocent Catherine to the "great" and "wise" Henry Tilney—"because they are not clever enough for you; gentlemen read better books." But Henry declares with emphasis that, on the other hand, "the person, be it gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid."

Catherine is "very glad to hear it. But I really thought before young men despised novels amazingly."

"It is *amazingly*; it may well suggest *amazement* if they do, for they read nearly as many as women. I, myself, have read hundreds and hundreds. Do not imagine that you can cope with me in a knowledge of Julias and Louisas. If we proceed to particulars and engage in the never-ceasing enquiry of 'Have you read this?' and 'Have you read that?' I shall soon leave you far behind."

Already, in one of her own rare outbursts of personal opinion, Jane Austen had provided her heroine with

an excuse for shutting herself up on a "rainy morning" to read novels with her best friend :—

> Yes, novels ; for I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom, so common with novel-writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances to the number of which they are themselves adding ; joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works, and scarcely ever permitting them to be read by their own heroine, who, if she accidentally take up a novel, is sure to turn over its pages with disgust. Alas ! if the heroine of one novel be not patronised by the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard ? I cannot approve it. Let us leave it to the Reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure, and over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans. Let us not desert one another ; we are an injured body. *Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than any other literary corporation in the world,* no species of composition has been so much decried.* From pride, ignorance, or fashion, our foes are almost as many as our readers ; and while the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the "Spectator," and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogized by a thousand pens,† there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist, and of slighting the performances *which have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them.* 'I am no novel-reader ; I seldom look into novels ; do not imagine that *I* often read novels ; it is really very well for a novel.' Such is the common cant. 'And what are you reading, Miss —— ?' 'Oh ! it is only a novel !' replies the young lady ; while she lays down her

* So says Fanny Burney :—"In the republic of letters, there is no member of such inferior rank, or who is so much disdained by his brethren of the quill, as the humble novelist," and Robert Bage remarked, in *Hermsprong*, that "novels are now pretty generally considered as the lowest of all human productions."

† Mary, we know, was always teasing her sisters with "some new extracts to admire, and some new observations of *threadbare* morality to listen to." She borrowed them, largely, from Evelina's "dearest of guardians," Mr. Villars !

book with affected indifference, or momentary shame. *'It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda'; or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language.* Now, had the same young lady been engaged with a volume of the 'Spectator,' instead of such a work, how proudly could she have produced the book, and told its name! though the chances must be against her being occupied by any part of that voluminous publication, of which either the matter or manner would not disgust a young person of taste; the substance of its papers so often consisting in the statement of improbable circumstances, *unnatural characters*, and topics of conversation, *which no longer concern anyone living*; and their language, too, frequently so coarse as to give no very favourable idea of the age that could endure it.

In every particular, the published novels confirm her familiarity with the fictions of the day and her delight therein; her determination to satirise them with friendly wit and, at the same time, to make her own work more just and true to real life.

Northanger Abbey was built out of books; in every character, situation and turn of phrase—Mrs. Radcliffe, Fanny Burney and a host of "evergreen follies" from the Library. *Sense and Sensibility* is a warm-hearted study of an old-world, *literary*, female grace. I worked out years ago a fairly complete summary of the numerous echoes from Fanny Burney in all her books—in addition to the title of *Pride and Prejudice* and its close parallelism to *Cecilia*.

Despite the emotional charm and the occasional matchless humour of her *Letters*, no biographical record of Jane Austen has ever satisfied her most devout admirers. But they confirm beyond all possible dispute both sides of my argument as to her attitude about books.

...E AND ...NIOR COLLEC...

There is nowhere any attempt at serious criticism or any pretension to taste for serious literature :— "Ladies who read those enormous great stupid thick quarto volumes which one always sees in the breakfast parlour there must be acquainted with everything in the world. I detest a quarto. Capt. Pasley's book is too good for their Society. They will not understand a man who condenses his thoughts into an octavo." (To Cassandra, February, 1813.)

And when a certain Mrs. Martin indulged the boast that *her* Library would "*not* consist only of novels, but of every kind of literature," Jane writes, "She might have spared this pretension to *our* family who are great novel-readers, and not ashamed of being so."

On the other hand, her eager enjoyment in every kind of story appears again and again, with reference to long-forgotten writers and books ; and there is more than one allusion to the family's own energy in securing an abundant supply of "something to read"—"The Miss Sibleys want to establish a Book Society in their side of the country like ours. What can be a stronger proof of that superiority in ours over the Manytown and Steventon Society, which I have always foreseen and felt ? No emulation of the kind was ever inspired by *their* proceedings ; no such wish of the Miss Sibleys was ever heard in the many years of that Society's existence. And what are their Biglands and their Barrows, their Macartneys and their Mackenzies to Captain Pasley's *Essay on the Military Police of the British Empire* and *The Rejected Addresses ?*" (To Cassandra, January, 1813.)

CHAPTER III

LIFE MUST CORRECT ROMANCE

RICHARDSON plainly states the *corrective* and improving aim of his realism. Being invited by certain "professional" friends to write "a little book of familiar letters on the useful concerns of common life," it occurred to him that he could improve upon the hint. By publishing a natural *story* "he might introduce a new species of writing that might possibly turn young people into a course of reading different from *the pomp and parade of romance-writing*, and, *dismissing the improbable and marvellous, with which novels generally abound*, might tend to promote the cause of religion and virtue."

Scott contends that the "effort at introducing actual *novelty* is more likely to produce monsters than models of composition." In the Preface to Fanny Burney's *Evelina* we read: "*To draw characters from nature*, and to mark the manners of the times, is the attempted plan of the following letters."

Other writers, besides Jane Austen, had commented freely upon the unlikeness of fiction to real life—as a subject of amusement or regret.

The anonymous author of the *Pursuits of Literature* remarked that "though all of them are ingenious ladies, yet they are too frequently whining and frisking

in novels, till our girls' heads turn wild with *impossible* adventures."

Hannah More, with that easy sprightliness that so unexpectedly distinguished her private letters, has a charming descriptive passage (in *The Two Wealthy Farmers*) of " A Plain Man on his Daughter's Favourite Novels " :—

> I could make neither head nor tail of it ; it was neither fish, flesh, nor good-red-herring ; it was all about my Lord, and Sir Harry, and the Captain. But I never met with such nonsensical fellows in my life. Their talk was *no more like* that of my old landlord, who was a lord, you know, nor the captain of our fencibles, *than chalk is like cheese*. I was fairly taken in at first, and began to think I had got hold of a godly book ; for there was a deal about hope and despair, and death, and heaven, and angels, and torments, and everlasting happiness. But when I got a little on, I found there was no meaning in all these words, or if any it was a bad meaning. Eternal misery, perhaps, only meant a moment's disappointment about a bit of a letter ; and everlasting happiness meant two people talking nonsense together for five minutes. In short, *I never met with such a pack of lies*. The people talk such wild gibberish as no folks in their sober senses ever did talk ; and *the things that happen to them are not like the things that ever happen to me or any of my acquaintance*. They are at home one minute, and beyond the sea the next ; beggars to-day, and lords to-morrow ; waiting-maids in the morning and duchesses at night. Nothing happens in a natural gradual way, as it does at home ; they grow rich by the stroke of a wand, and poor by the magic of a word ; the disinherited orphan of this hour is the overgrown heir of the next ; now a bride and bridegroom turn out to be a brother and sister, and the brother and sister prove to be no relations at all. . . . Then there is another thing *which I never meet with in real life*. We think it pretty well, you know, if one has got one thing, and another has got another. I will tell you how I mean. You are reckoned sensible, one person is learned, the squire is rich, I am rather generous, one of your daughters is pretty, and both mine are genteel. But in these books (except here and there one whom they make worse than Satan

himself), every man and woman's child of them are all wise, and witty, and generous, and rich, and handsome, and genteel, and all to the last degree. Nobody is middling, or good in one thing and bad in another, like my live acquaintance; but it is all up to the skies or down to the dirt.

In *Love and Friendship* we find Sir Edward enraged by the "noble manliness of his son's reply":—"Where, Edward, in the name of wonder (said he) did you pick up this unmeaning gibberish? *You have been studying novels, I suspect.*"

But it is Henry Tilney, in *Northanger Abbey*, who gives Jane Austen away.

With good-humoured wit, and in a spirit of brotherly teasing, he led the innocent Catherine to anticipate all the mysteries and horrors she loved in *Udolpho;* but when she *applies* her reading to real life, judging his father by romantically unjust suspicions, he turns the tables on her; gently, indeed, but firmly.

"Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English—that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you. Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Could they be perpetrated without being known in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing, where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?"

No words could describe more clearly and justly Miss Austen's own methods of work; the process by which her *truthful* novels, with their inimitable

characterisation, have been transformed from the tinsel of romantic sentimentality in which the novels of her day abound; that are so perfectly reproduced in *Love and Friendship*.

> For us, as for Catherine, 'the visions of romance are over.' We see that 'charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature—at least in the middle counties of England—was to be looked for.* Of the Alps and Pyrenees, with their pine forests and their vices, they might give a faithful delineation; and Italy, Switzerland, and the South of France might be as fruitful in horrors as they were represented. In the central part of England there was surely some security for the existence even of a wife not beloved, in the laws of the land and the manners of the age. Murder was not tolerated, servants were not slaves, and neither poison nor sleeping potions to be procured, like rhubarb, from every druggist. Among the Alps and Pyrenees, perhaps, there were no mixed characters. There, such as were not as spotless as an angel might have the dispositions of a fiend. But in England it was not so. Among the English, she believed, there was a general though unequal mixture of good and bad.

Jane Austen, we know, only attempts to put us right, and to draw real men and women, "in the midland counties of England." The double-edged satire with which she leaves most of the Continent to the mercies of Romance only points the force of her more serious intent; while recognising the limited ground on which she felt sure of herself, as what Scott describes her, "the faithful chronicler of English manners and English Society of the middling, or what is called the genteel, class."

Where, however, did she derive the perfect truthfulness of her character-study, the subtle and under-

* "All ladies know," wrote Robert Bage, "for all ladies read novels, how extremely dangerous the roads of England are for female travellers who happen to be young and handsome."

standing realism of a thousand "inevitable" fine shades? From a love of humanity that made her furious, while she laughed, at the current absurdities of her predecessors. At least the children of *her* brain and her genius should be as the wise, or foolish, but always delightful, sons and daughters of real men, her sisters and brothers, her neighbours and friends.

The development of Jane Austen may be seen from the parody of *Northanger Abbey* to the portraiture of *Persuasion*. Which is, perhaps, the normal development of the artist. We all begin as keen craftsmen, intent on the intricacies of our art, spreading ourselves gaily or cynically, upon new forms and the subtleties of mind, that are a little cold and indifferent towards humanity; so they shall fill the picture. Growth, and our own experience of life, add the soul's message, the real self given to mankind; enriching, warming and immortalizing the art.

The personal, emotional, nature of Jane Austen's corrective realism came, however, more from memory than observation. It seldom leads to moralising or the dramatising of ethics. There is no spirit of reform, outside a passionate applying of truth and justice to particular cases. For general morality and social ethics she, rather provokingly, accepts the conventional religious outlook; because she is telling stories, writing books, not sermons or a human document.

Her almost vehement sincerity towards women largely came from what was, evidently, a ruling factor of her own life, the bond of perfect love for her sister Cassandra. We see it, of course, in Elizabeth and Jane Bennet; Emma and Harriet—who are sisterly; Ellinor and Marianne Dashwood, whose love, indeed, suffered much and was kind; while, in minor folk, the Musgroves

(Louisa and Henrietta) are plainly revealed with more subtle links and contrasts than the Bertrams (Julia and Maria). It was her family, again, who supplied the tender pride in William Price ; the side-hint at loose morals in Crawford's uncle, set against the full-length portrait of Admiral and Mrs. Croft ; above all, Captain Wentworth. From her own parsonage she drew the charming, if not over-devout, young clergymen—Henry Tilney, Edward Ferrars and Edmund Crawford ; as Mr. Elton, no doubt, tormented the next parish.

Her passion for truth, in fact, appears in individual character-drawing, is inspired by individual circumstances, when the author feels in her bones that her people are really alive. It is *not* the realism or passion of the reformer—of life or of art.

As a novelist we can even see that, like her own Anne Elliot, she "*had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older.*" The "woman" in her (not the girl-author of *Love and Friendship* or *Northanger Abbey*) could be eloquent "on the side of early warm attachment and a cheerful confidence in futurity, against that over-anxious caution that seems to insult exertion and distrust providence." Her ideal in man came to be the ardour and confidence of Captain Wentworth that "seemed to foresee and to command his prosperous path" ; just as *his* ideal in woman was "*a strong mind, with sweetness of manner*" ; not, as he said in his haste, the somewhat obstinate, and really weak, "decision and firmness" of a Louisa Musgrove. "It could scarcely escape him to feel that a persuadable temper might sometimes be in favour of happiness." Thus did Emma submit to Knightley, Elizabeth look up to Darcy.

From the first, indeed, she distrusted a too "clever, cautious man."

"Mr. Elliot was rational, discreet, polished, but he was not open. There was never any burst of feeling, any warmth of indignation or delight, at the evil or good of others. This, to her, was a decided imperfection. . . She prized the frank, the open-hearted, the eager character beyond all others. Warmth and enthusiasm did captivate her. She felt that she could so much more depend upon the sincerity of those who sometimes looked or said a careless or a hasty thing than of those whose presence of mind never varied, whose tongue never slipped."

She could feel, too, the charm "of natural folly" and generous impulse, "in a beautiful girl," as Catherine Morland and Marianne Dashwood live in our hearts to witness; but for herself it had not been thus.

As Miss Clemence Dane writes of the "amazing papers" in *Love and Friendship*:—

> They prove what one always suspected, that in Jane Austen the usual order of development is reversed. Most people are born with a heart and develop a head; but Jane seems to have arrived intellectually complete, the late-born darling of the age of cold reason, every faculty alert; but with a heart so fast asleep, so briared and wintered over by wit, caution, and common sense, that it is a wonder it ever woke at all. That it did wake, to warm like a slow-rising sun her chill and glittering world the novels show in delicious gradation, as one by one they merge the cruel wit of her childhood in the rich humour of her prime. It is difficult to comprehend how anyone, in face of the sad and exquisite autumn sunshine of *Persuasion*, can repeat (as Mrs. Meynell, strangely enough, so recently did) 'the old reproach, that Jane Austen didn't understand and couldn't draw the deepest feelings of our hearts.'

As already implied, I personally hold that Jane Austen did *not* here "*reverse* the *usual* order of development." Surely, at least in art, it is always *youth* which

ignores tender humanity, and glories in the cold wit of a *Love's Labour Lost*, with what Professor Dowden so aptly calls its "brilliant unrealities, affectations of dress, of manner, of language and *of ideas*."

After all, Jane's outlook from the first was Elizabeth Bennet's—"I hope I never ridicule what is wise or good. Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies, do divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can." Her love and her admiration, however, was reserved for "Sister" Jane, who always "spoke what she thought."—"I know you do, and it is *that* which makes the wonder. With your good sense, to be blind to the follies and nonsense of others! Affectation of candour is common enough—one meets it everywhere. But to be candid without ostentation or design—to take the good of everyone's character and make it still better, and say nothing of the bad—belongs to you alone."

It was, surely, the "follies and nonsense, the whims and inconsistencies," of contemporary *fiction* (of "that distinguished part of the fair sex called heroines," as Robert Bage expressed it), on which Jane Austen first learned, and always delighted, to sharpen her shrewd pen.

There are, moreover, two "revelations" (if one may use the phrase) in Jane Austen's own letters which confirm our estimate of her precocity, and her strong taste for "literary" satire.

It is on record that she advised one of her nieces to "cease writing till she was sixteen"! as she herself "often wished she had read more and written less in the corresponding years of her life."

The Mystery, "as complete as any of its kind"; *Kitty; or, the Bower*, which "possessed merit beyond any novel already published, or any that will ever in

future appear" ; no less than *Henry and Eliza* or *Jack and Alice,* were evidently all burlesques ; while the extraordinarily interesting "plan of a novel according to hints from various quarters," drawn up in 1816,* proves both the persistence of her enjoyment in novel-nonsense and the similar tastes of all her family and friends.

Here the "faultless, perfectly good and highly accomplished" heroine, and her father, "the most excellent man that can be imagined," are to "converse in long speeches, and a tone of high serious sentiment." These delightful companions are never to be "above a fortnight together in one place." She is often "carried away by the anti-hero, and now and then starved to death" ; but, in the end, "crawls back towards her former country, and the arms of the hero," who is, "of course, all perfection." Her father is "of a very literary turn, nobody's enemy but his own" ; and, "after four or five hours of tender advice, expires in a fine burst of literary enthusiasm, intermingled with invectives against holders of tithes."

There will be "a striking variety of adventures" all over the world, but "*no mixture*" of characters. "All the good will be unexceptionable," and "the wicked will be completely depraved and infamous," with "hardly a resemblance of humanity left in them."

Emma has been published ; *Persuasion* is nearly finished ; and the author is no less ready with the glorious nonsense about her sister-writers,that inspired *Love and Friendship* more than thirty years ago !

* Printed in full in *Jane Austen : her Life and Letters,* by William and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh. 1913.

COLLEGE

CHAPTER IV

THE "EVERGREEN FOLLIES" OF FICTION

LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP was not, of course, specifically derived from one book, or from several books, that we can trace and compare. It plays upon the tone, incidents and atmosphere of a period; of which may be, as Professor Saintsbury suggests, *The Convent of Grey Penitents*, by Sarah Wilkinson, might claim representative pre-eminence—"in badness!"

Miss Austen, however, has craftily concealed all documentary proof. She has compressed into a small tabloid of her own patent the flavour and the ingredients of a generation of romance.

Her satirical explanation of our pleasure in these "entertaining" and "diverting" tales:—that "when one is unhappy nothing is so delightful as to hear of equal misery"; offers a shrewd comment upon Dr. Johnson's half-serious protest against *The Memoirs of Miss Sydney Bidulph* by Mrs. Frances Sheridan:—"I know not, madam, that you have a right—upon moral principles—to make your readers suffer so much."

Miss Austen speaks for "a young lady crossed in love" who had been driven to endure the perfidy of two "Crawfords" and has just "heard of Willoughby's marriage!" She was, in consequence, most "infinitely obliged" to her "dear

Miss Jane" (born an Annesley, now widow of Capt. Dashwood) for the tale of another's woe—"but I hope you have not done" . . . "Indeed I have: and did you ever hear anything more pathetic?"

Mackenzie's famous *Man of Feeling* found woman's "Beauty in a blush, a phrase of affability to an inferior, a tear at a moving tale."

No doubt, moreover, Jane Austen had not, like Robert Martin, forgotten *The Children of the Abbey* (1798), by Regina Maria Roche, which "should be read in early youth": "Hail, sweet sojourn of my Infancy," cries Amanda, as once more she gazes upon the old garden in which "the part appropriated to vegetables was divided from the part sacred to Flora."

The Man of Feeling (1771), by Henry Mackenzie—the best-known imitator of Sterne—was avowedly written to illustrate "the nicer and finer sensibilities of the human race." Its frail hero actually dies from shock when the Scotch maiden "of pensive face and mild hazel eyes," confesses she can return his love!*—"He seized her hand—a languid colour reddened his cheek, a smile brightened faintly in his eye. As he gazed on her, it grew dim, it fixed, it closed. He sighed and fell back on his seat. Miss Walton screamed at the sight. His aunt and the servants rushed into the room. They found them lying motionless together. His physician happened to call at that instant. Every art was tried to recover them—with Miss Walton they succeeded, but Harley was gone for ever."

Miss Austen has thus reproduced the scene in *Love and Friendship*:—"Every thought was now engaged by the horrid spectacle before us. Two gentlemen

* There was a lady in *David Simple* who could not survive great joy. "She fell from one fainting fit to another and lived but 3 days"—because her father forgave her.

most elegantly attired, but weltering in their blood was what first struck our eyes—dearest Marianne, they were our husbands. We remained mutually deprived of our senses—at length a groan restored us to ourselves. We hastily ran to the dear youth and kneeling on each side of him implored him not to die. 'Laura' (said he fixing his now languid eyes on me) 'I fear I have been overturned.' 'Oh tell me, Edward' (said I), 'tell me I beseech you before you die, what has befallen you since that unhappy day in which we were separated.' 'I will' (said he), and instantly fetching a deep sigh, expired——."

She might almost, indeed, have herself written the phrase in Sarah Fielding's *Adventures of David Simple, in search of a real Friend,* where the authoress leaves David to his sufferings, after his first betrayal, "lest it should be thought I am so ignorant of the world as not to know the proper time of forsaking people."

We can, however, clearly detect and examine the many ideas and tricks of phrase or incident that are here "revived" from the objects of her laughing ridicule, which were never, in any single instance, allowed a place in her published work. 1. There is everywhere in *Love and Friendship* a certain crude and wild spirit of adventure. When the "amiable Edward" left home in anger, to visit his aunt, he, romantically, lost his way: "My father's house is situated in Bedfordshire, my aunt's in Middlesex, and tho' I flatter myself with being a tolerable proficient in geography, I know not how it happened, but I found myself entering this beautiful vale which I find is in South Wales, when I had expected to have reached my aunt's . . . It was now perfectly dark, not a single star was there to direct my steps."

With similar indifference to a settled domesticity, the heroine dragged her Sophia into a carriage and "instantly set out for London." In Holborn she "enquired of every decent-looking person that we passed" if they had seen her Edward; but "drove too rapidly to allow them to answer." When Sophia's "just" sentiments checked further pursuit, "the Postilion was instantly directed to return into the country." Later wanderings over Scotland and "the remainder of Great Britain," naturally end with "confusion, despair, and precipitation."

2. The stock-heroine of Romance always owns to a strangely variegated descent:—"My father was a native of Ireland and an inhabitant of Wales; my mother was the natural daughter of a Scotch peer by an Italian opera-girl—I was born in Spain, and received my education at a convent in France."

Still more surprising was the heroes' pride of birth:—

"We are the sons, as you already know, of the two youngest daughters which Lord St. Clair had by Laurina, an Italian opera girl, our mothers could neither of them exactly ascertain who were our father, though it is generally believed that Philander is the son of one Philip Jones, a bricklayer, and that my father was Gregory Staves, a staymaker of Edinburgh. This is, however, of little consequence, for as our mothers were certainly never married to either of them, it reflects no dishonour on our blood, which is of the most ancient and unpolluted kind."*

3. We know, if Fanny Burney had not repeated the device in *Evelina*, that the finding of long-lost relations

* The hero of Mrs. Hayward's *Betsy Thoughtless* was "descended from the ancient Britons by the father's side, and by the mother's from the Oldcastles of Kent."

was a frequent occasion for the extremes of romantic sensibility.

We were stepping into the carriage when our attention was attracted by the entrance of a coronetted coach and four into the inn-yard. A gentleman, considerably advanced in years, descended from it. At his first appearance my sensibility was wonderfully affected, and ere I had gazed at him a second time, an instinctive sympathy whispered to my heart that he was my grandfather. . . . I threw myself on my knees before him, and besought him to acknowledge me as his grandchild. He started, and after having attentively examined my features, raised me from the ground. . . . and exclaimed . . . 'Yes, dear resemblance of my Laurina and my Laurina's daughter, sweet image of my Claudia and my Claudia's mother, I do acknowledge thee as the daughter of the one and the granddaughter of the other. . . .' Sophia entered the room. No sooner had she caught the eye of the venerable peer, than he exclaimed with every mark of astonishment: 'Another granddaughter! Yes, yes, I see . . . your resemblance to the beauteous Matilda sufficiently proclaims it.' 'Oh,' replied Sophia, 'when I first beheld you the instinct of nature whispered me that we were in some degree related. But whether grandfathers or grandmothers, I could not pretend to determine.' . . . The door of the apartment opened, and a most beautiful young man appeared. On perceiving him, Lord St. Clair started, and retreating back a few paces, with uplifted hands, said, 'Another grandchild! . . . This, I am certain, is Philander, the son of my Laurina's third girl, the amiable Bertha; there wants now but the presence of Gustavus to complete the union of my Laurina's grandchildren.'

'And here he is,' said a graceful youth who that instant entered the room. . . . 'I am the son of Agatha, your Laurina's fourth and youngest daughter.' 'I see you are indeed, replied Lord St. Clair; but tell me, have I any other grandchildren in the house.'* 'None, my Lord.' 'Then I will provide for you all without delay. Here are

* We are reminded of Mr. Bennet's contented raillery, when Elizabeth at last convinced him that she loved Darcy:—"If any young men come for Mary or Kitty, send them in."

four banknotes of £50 each. Take them, and remember that I have done the duty of a grandfather.'

He instantly left the room, and immediately afterwards the house."

4. The frequent and almost regular habit of fainting "alternately on sofas," or beside a brook; and of the "frenzy fit."

Sophia had "caught cold by her continued faintings in the open air, as the dew was falling the evening before"; while the "bodily exertions" of Laura's "repeated fits of frenzy" had "circulated and warmed her blood."

"I die," sobbed the unlucky Sophia, "a martyr to my grief. One fatal swoon has cost me my life. Beware of swoons, dear Laura. . . . A frenzy fit is not one quarter so pernicious . . . run mad as often as you choose, but do not faint."

Every hero, or heroine, of the old romance was given to constant frenzy; and, as an extreme instance, Macaulay has put on record his analysis of the "twenty-seven fainting fits" in *Santa Sebastiano* by Mrs. Kitty Cuthbertson.

Julia de Clifford	on	11	occasions.
Lady Delamere	,,	4	,,
Lady Theodosia	,,	4	,,
Lord Glenbrook	,,	2	,,
Lord Delamere	,,	2	,,
Lady Enderfield	,,	1	,,
Lord Asgrove	,,	1	,,
Lord St. Orville	,,	1	,,
Henry Mildmay	,,	1	,,
		27	

5. The murders and violence, the dark mysteries and horrid crimes, which Catherine Morland so naively

expects to be always lurking behind a door carefully shut.

A young lady, " whose feelings, being too strong for her judgment, led her into the commission of errors which her heart disapproved," sent her beloved Elinor the following summary of a misspent life :—

" I murdered my father at a very early period of my life, I have since murdered my brother, and I am now going to murder my sister. I have changed my religion so often that at present I have not an idea of any left. I have been a perjured witness in every public trial for these past twelve years ; and I have forged my own will. . . . I am now going to murder my sister. Yours ever, ANNA PARKER."

We have here obvious parody or caricature, three volumes of romantic moonshine compressed into a few sparkling pages. The effect, therefore, if not the substance, does produce some measure of exaggeration —though not much. *Love and Friendship*, however, must stand to witness the keen enjoyment that such absurdity can provoke, in which a shrewd eye for false sentiment may indulge. We see, further, that in her deliberate and more kindly, though still keen and humorous, treatment of *the same material*, for her artistic " inventions," Miss Austen has cut away every sensational and melodramatic element of the old fabric, the tricks and trappings of positively disordered imagination, *contrivances* to excite.

From such material we do not expect much foreshadowing of maturer work, although the main substance or romance-structure remains in every novel. Jane Austen never attempted to change the fiction-form from which this rattling burlesque grew out of her amazing precocity. Since, however, there is no individual life here, only names for types, we shall not

find marked, or clear, clues to later characterisations.

Mr. G. K. Chesterton ingeniously sees "something like the first faint line in the figure of Fanny Price" about the "girl in the white cottage," who was "nothing more than a mere good-tempered, civil and obliging young woman; as such we could scarcely dislike her—she was only an object of contempt."

The "aggravating leisure and lucidity" with which the heroine's father "enquires the nature of the noise," when a "loud knocking is heard on the door of the Rustic Cot," is also claimed to be "the unmistakable voice of Mr. Bennet."

Laura declares that, "lovely as I was, the graces of my person were the least of my perfections. Of every accomplishment customary to my sex, I was mistress. When in the convent, my progress had always exceeded my instructions, my acquirements had been wonderful for my age, and I had shortly surpassed my masters.

"In my mind every virtue that could adorn it was centred; it was the *rendezvous* of every good quality and of every noble sentiment."

She was surely the "accomplished woman" of Miss Bingley's imagination, who "must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing and the modern languages . . . and, besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions."

Unless, indeed, like Lady Susan, she was no "advocate *for the prevailing fashion of acquiring a perfect knowledge of all languages, arts and sciences,*" and did not mean that any girl's "acquirements should be more than superficial," since she would "not remain long enough at school to understand anything thoroughly."

When Sophia is longing to " learn the fate of her Augustus—to know if he is still in Newgate or if he is yet hung," she cried, " but never shall I be able so far to conquer my tender sensibility as to enquire after him."

We remember that Elinor " thought Mrs. Dashwood's generosity overstrained " by her " *refusal to force the confidence* " of a daughter.

" The old " Beau " of 57, " the flighty stripling, the gay lad, and sprightly youngster " in *Leslie Castle*, has some affinity with Sir William Elliot, who was " thoughtless " if not " dissipated."

Perhaps, however, the closest parallel can be detected between the " abominable rudeness " of Miss de Burgh in " keeping Charlotte out of doors in all this wind," and Lady Greville's insulting consolations to poor Maria, who " was obliged to stand " beside her Ladyship's carriage, " though the wind was extremely high and very cold."

> " It is a horrible east wind. . . . I assure you I can hardly bear the window down. But you are used to being blown about by the wind, Miss Maria, and that is what has made your complexion so ruddy and coarse. You young ladies who cannot often ride in a carriage, never mind what weather you trudge in, or how the wind shows your legs. I would not have *my* girls stand out of doors as you do in such a day as this. But some sort of people have no feelings either of cold or delicacy."

We remember the elegant raillery (!) of Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley upon Elizabeth's " wild " and " blowsy " hair and the state of her petticoat, when she was " scampering about the country because her sister had a cold."

Indeed, this whole " third letter " of the " Comical Cousin's Collection " from " a young lady in distressed

circumstances to her friend," contains a full and remarkably lifelike miniature of Lady Catherine de Burgh's ordinary style of conversation, her impertinent curiosity, and her genius for mortifying the young.

The first letter of this "Collection" includes an amusing description of "A. F.'s" delight in having successfully got "out" her elegant-looking girls. "As the moment approached . . . how the sweet creatures trembled with fear and expectation!" From Mrs. Copes, however, they "returned in raptures with the world, its inhabitants and manners."

Though "Augusta was 17 and her sister a twelvemonth younger," their mother was "willing to forget the difference of age and to introduce them *together* into public." We recall Lady Catherine's scornful surprise —that the "younger" Miss Bennets were allowed "out" before "the elder are married!" and Elizabeth's sturdy defence: "The last-born has as good a right to the pleasures of youth as the first. And to be kept back on *such* a motive! I think it would not be very likely to promote sisterly affection or delicacy of mind." On the other hand, Edmund Bertram finds "the 'outs' and 'not outs' altogether beyond him," and the more volatile brother Tom tells two anecdotes against himself—of the young lady who "turned from him with such an air" when she was "not out," and "stared him out of countenance" when she was; and of his embarrassing attentions to Miss Augusta Sneyd, who "ought not to have been noticed for six months"—and "Miss Sneyd, I believe, has never forgiven me!"

There is, finally, one matchless phrase, in which Miss Austen may seem, by some uncanny foresight, to have epitomised the scenes within which she was always content to work: "*Our neighbourhood was small, for it consisted only of your mother.*" Though she, indeed,

" had seen the world. She had passed two years at one of the first boarding-schools in London, had spent a fortnight in Bath, and had supped one night in Southampton."

So much for the material of these first-fruits of Genius. All I have said should prepare us, however, to find that the style of *Love and Friendship* approaches far more nearly than the substance, to that of the later work. In intellect, and in the mechanical structure of her art, Jane Austen was almost wickedly precocious. It is, indeed, scarcely an exaggeration to claim for these astonishing *jeux d'esprit*, that they exhibit—with all the ease of natural spontaneity—every one of the characteristics of her matchless style, which is at once the most instinctive and the most polished it would seem possible to conceive. They are often, no doubt, far more careless and far less pointed in detail, if we examine each sentence—as it were—on its own merits. But this seems to arise more from an indifference to effect, that belongs to private diaries or correspondence, than from any lack of power to control her pen. At one moment, she runs on with little, or no, conscious attention to word or phrase (even then seldom missing her natural vigour and discretion) ; while the next paragraph will, with no more apparent effort, be composed to a perfection that must have become " second nature " when she elected to turn author.

Though *Pride and Prejudice* reveals a curious conception of university life ; it is, perhaps, worth remark that the earlier allusion here to " one of the Universities of Aberdeen " is not a proof of carelessness or ignorance. That city was thus distinguished in her day ; and when an amalgamation was proposed in

1860, a patriotic Aberdonian is said to have uttered this truly Scotch protest :—" Do you mean to say that Aberdeen is to have only one University, *when a place like England has two !* "

The " partial, prejudiced, and ignorant " *History of England,* for which Cassandra drew such fascinating, miniature, " royal portraits," will, inevitably, bring to mind Catherine Morland's naïve views on this solemn subject :—" I often think it odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention. . . . I shall not pity the writers of history any longer. If people like to read their books, it is all very well ; but to be at so much trouble in filling great volumes—to be labouring only for the torment of little boys and girls, always struck me as a hard fate."

Her own motive, in this matter, cannot be open to such reproach. Her " principal reason for undertaking " this work was certainly not " to torment," that is " to instruct " ; but to " prove the innocence of the Queen of Scotland " (that " bewitching Princess whose only friend was then the Duke of Norfolk, and whose only ones now are Mr. Whitaker, Mrs. Lefroy, Mrs. Knight, and myself "), and to " abuse that disgrace to humanity, that pest of Society, Elizabeth."

There are " very few dates in this History—yet *truth being I think very excusable in an Historian,* I am necessitated to say that in " James the first's reign the roman catholics of England did not behave like gentlemen to the protestants."

Miss Austen must have been reading *A Peep at Our Ancestors* (1807), by Miss Henrietta Mosse, who has therein laid it down that " no small portion of moral culpability attaches to that writer who, for the convenience of his own pen, wilfully represents as true what he knows to be false."

CHAPTER V

A FEW ROMANCE-PERSONS—IN THE NOVELS

WE suspected it from the picaresque *Lady Susan* and the mock-heroics of *Northanger Abbey*. It is established beyond dispute, by the inimitable *Love and Friendship*, a parody without one hint of heart.

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to imagine a less consciously autobiographical effusion of youth; and yet, like all young people, she has hopelessly given herself away. The keen and vivid enjoyment in fiction-folly, the intimate familiarity with every turn and twist of the popular novelist's inane mind, the unsparing delight in her own powers of shameless ridicule, are all there.

Writing these family "scraps" for her own friends, she felt no need to champion humanity. They knew her heart and their own hearts. For them she could lash out at literature without the risk of being misunderstood. It was the stupid public who would add flesh* and blood to "Laurentina's skeleton," and mistake "Counts in Italy" for real men.*

* It was this possibility of being misunderstood, I expect, which restrained Jane Austen from publishing *Lady Susan*. While permitting herself severity towards a Mrs. Norris, she would not run the risk of presenting what might easily be read as a wholly cynical view of her own sex and of a section of Society. The bitterness, too, she could not altogether escape, is here emphasized beyond the dictates of her normally sympathetic outlook.

So she contrived to eliminate every spark of reality from the persons of her tale; and the cynicism is unmeasured and without remorse.

There is no hint or effort of understanding: no mercy for the dressed dolls of literary sawdust, pulled hither and thither to torture or ecstacy by her cunning brain-wires.

How nearly they, nevertheless, resemble the foolish originals, how interested and how book-learned the author is thereby revealed, only a close familiarity with the literature of the period can fully disclose. It should be noted, however, that she assumes equal familiarity and similar tastes, in her own folk, for whom alone these fragments were composed—to whom no explanation or apology could be required. They prove that she grew up, and lived, among books and the love of books.

With the same mastery of technique as in her published novels, she plunges right into her subject, characters, and atmosphere, fully confident that her readers will at once appreciate and understand. We can feel how they must all have often chuckled with unreserved delight as they read of beautiful maidens with the blood of every race in their veins; who "alternately fainted" on a sofa always conveniently at hand, or who, meditating among the nettles beside the murmuring brook, ran mad every moment "for an hour and a quarter;"——"They told me Edward was not dead; but they deceived me—they took him for a cucumber." Novels were written in those days to record "the determined perseverance of disagreeable Lovers and the cruel Persecutions of obstinate Fathers"*; to applaud those young men of whom it

* In *Northanger Abbey* it was left "to be settled by whomsoever it may concern whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny or reward filial disobedience."

could never be said that they had obliged their fathers ; and who, having stolen their mothers' fortunes as soon as " they had reached their fifteenth year," afterwards heard accidentally that the ladies had been " starved to death " ; to dilate, rapturously, upon " perfect lovers " who " had been amply supported—for a few months—by a considerable sum of money which they had gracefully purloined from their unworthy fathers," and " who would have blushed at the idea of paying their debts."

It would be easy, of course, to say in our haste that such pitiless severity only proves that Jane Austen was, after all, cynical at heart, prosaic in her instinct for common sense, mercenary or conventional in her moral outlook. Yet a comparison of *Love and Friendship* with her published work must convince us of the exact reverse.

In the exuberance of youthful parody, there is, indeed, obvious cynicism—naked and unashamed. We see here a sparkling epitome of *inhuman* romance, which is the coldest and most material selfishness ; of reckless idleness and enjoyment, as the meaning of marriage :* we find unmeasured scorn for the callous absurdities of so-called " generous " youth. But the application throughout is to dramatic sawdust. It is a criticism, and reproduction, of art—not of life.

The complete change of tone, the new note—of reality *and* tenderness (speaking her love of man in *serious* criticism of false romance)—is obvious from the first—in *Northanger Abbey* itself.

Only, like Shakespeare, she *left in* a few romance-persons (lifted from the older novels, without the

* As Robert Bage describes one of his heroines : " At eighteen she was angelic, for she had a smooth white skin, and £12,000."

Austen touch) ; and towards them she remained the cynic and almost mercilessly cold.

This may be seen, perhaps, most clearly in a comparison of such characters from type as Lady Catherine and Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice,* with Mr. Woodhouse and Miss Bates in *Emma.* Obviously the former are exaggerated without fear, lashed without mercy. Their absurdities are more extreme and more mechanically consistent than would be possible in real life. She had no feeling for or about them ; nor have we.

There is a passage in Sarah Fielding's *David Simple* which, at any rate, suggests an earlier Mr. Collins. Here, too, the gentleman kindly expounds " the whole duty " of wives :—

" I shall expect nothing of you but that you will retire into the country with me and take care of my family. I must inform you that I shall desire to have everything in order, for I love good eating and drinking, and have been used to have my own humour from my youth ; which, if you will observe and comply with, I shall be very kind to you, and take care of the main chance for you and your children."

You may say, perhaps, that Mr. Woodhouse is a trifle overdone ; Miss Bates is laboured beyond human nature. Yet both are handled with an unmistakable tenderness that endears them to all. There was no one to care for Lady Catherine, as Emma loved her father ; no one to respect Mr. Collins, as we all respect Miss Bates. The clergyman cared for no one, as the old maid loved her mother.

> " Miss Bates enjoyed a most uncommon degree of popularity for a woman neither young, handsome, rich, nor married. She stood in the very worst predicament in the world for having much of the public favour ; and she had

no intellectual superiority to make atonement to herself; or frighten those who might hate her into outward respect. She had never boasted either beauty or cleverness. Her youth had passed without distinction, and her middle of life was devoted to the care of a failing mother, and the endeavour to make a small income go as far as possible. And yet she was a happy woman, and a woman whom no one named without goodwill. It was her own universal goodwill and contented temper which worked such wonders. She loved everybody, was interested in everybody's happiness, quick-sighted to everybody's merits; thought herself a most fortunate creature, and surrounded with blessings in such an excellent mother, and so many good neighbours and friends, and a home that wanted for nothing. The simplicity and cheerfulness of her nature, her contented and grateful spirit, were a recommendation to everybody, and a mine of felicity to herself."

Lady Catherine was rich and, in a sense, intellectual; but she was not re-made by the emotions, and we scarcely think of her as a woman.

Miss Austen did not, indeed, do much for any of the Thorpes or for General Tilney in *Northanger Abbey;* for Mr. Rushworth in *Mansfield Park;* for Mrs. Palmer in *Sense and Sensibility*. Lady Middleton, on the other hand, she developed in Lady Bertram; Mr. Palmer she repeated, with some improvements, in Mr. Hurst. We might almost expect to find any of these "character-parts" in *Love and Friendship*.

I am myself rather disposed to explain Lydia Bennet in the same way. We have all, I suspect, been a little uneasy about the episode of her disgrace. Mary, of course, was always an impossible, if not an intolerable, young person; and her appalling platitudes on the occasion were borrowed direct from the most worthy Mr. Villars (of *Evelina*).

"Unhappy as the event must be for Lydia," she complacently remarks, "we may draw from it this useful lesson; that loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable—that one

false step involves her in endless ruin—that her reputation *is no less brittle than it is beautiful*, and that she cannot be too guarded in her behaviour towards the undeserving of the other sex."

Now Mr. Villars had written :—

" Remember, my dear Evelina, nothing is so delicate as the reputation of a woman ; *it is at once the most beautiful and the most brittle* of all human things."*

But even Elizabeth's thoughts turn almost immediately to what her sister's " infamy must produce " in its effect upon her own " noble suitor " ; I do not believe that even Jane really sorrowed greatly for Lydia herself ; and Darcy's generous " patching-up of the disgraceful affair," entirely lacks the human sympathy of Colonel Brandon for the unfortunate Eliza ; though *his* responsibility towards mother and daughter again recalls Mr. Villars's anxious care for two generations.

In any case, the whole treatment of Lydia conclusively removes Jane Austen from the modern realists. She is neither oppressed by ethics nor determined upon naked truth. The episode never develops into a problem as, to some extent, it did for Maria Bertram : the one occasion on which Miss Austen considered, even incidentally, the " eternal triangle." If we could set Mr. Compton Mackenzie or Mr. W. L. George, to rewrite *Pride and Prejudice*, we know that Lydia would be their heroine, the one *real* woman among a tribe of colourless, or cruel, conventionals. Mr. Frank Swinnerton, indeed, would have left her as an episode, but—probably—given us a second Minnie Bayley to torture a *Chaste Wife*.

Miss Austen's ruthlessness towards the " susceptibility " of the girl whose " feelings " were " naturally

* Mrs. Hayward expressed the ideal with similar formality :— " The honour of a young maid is a flower of so tender and delicate a nature, that the least breath of scandal withers and destroys it."

lively enough" ; her neat, placid, dismissal of the crude flirt (a younger *Lady Susan*) ; may be accepted as an almost casual use of the typical "frail female" of fiction ; a distasteful being to whom she has not actually given life ; for whom, therefore, she feels, as it were, no personal moral responsibility. Towards Maria she is severe, perhaps, but with genuine moral passion ; and not without a passing reflection "that punishment, the public punishment of disgrace, should in a just measure attend *his* share of the offence is, we know, not one of the barriers which society gives to virtue." Towards Eliza she is forgiving ; while the similar perils Marianne Dashwood (perhaps) and Georgina Darcy (no doubt) only just escaped, prompt her to loving pity.

It is towards Lydia, and no one else, that Jane Austen can be charged, by thoughtful critics, with serious moral conventionality, or a hard heart. It is for this reason that I have dwelt upon her attitude in the matter ; because I believe that it can only be justified or understood, if we regard Lydia as fiction-made, not emotionally created—a mere "borrowed" instrument to scaffold the plot.

CHAPTER VI

FROM PARODY TO PORTRAITURE

THE "origin" of *Northanger Abbey* is obvious and familiar. Henry Tilney openly reconstructs an atmosphere from Mrs. Radcliffe; Isabella and Catherine devour *The Mysteries of Udolpho;* and, as we have already noted, the latter actually imagines that she is living in the weird land of that entrancing romance. Mlle. Villard *also,* notes the clear influence of *The Female Don Quixote* by Charlotte Lennox, in her chapters on "Humour and Satire."

The indebtedness to Fanny Burney is less obvious. Yet General Tilney unmistakably recalls Mr. Delville (in *Evelina*); and here, as in no other of Jane Austen's novels, the heroine is detached from her family and introduced into society under the inefficient protection of foolish acquaintances. Here, once more, in the words of the earlier novelist, "a young female, educated in the most secluded retirement, makes, at the age of seventeen, her first appearance upon the great and busy stage of life; with a virtuous mind—and a feeling heart. Her ignorance of the forms, and inexperience in the manners, of the world, occasion all the little incidents which this volume records, and which form the *natural* progression of the life of a young woman . . . for the first few months after her ENTRANCE INTO THE WORLD."

It was finally Miss Burney who *first* had the courage to be sincere about the "derogatory circumstance" of the hero's "affection" having arisen from "a persuasion of the heroine's partiality for him."* In claiming "the credit of a wild imagination" for herself, Miss Austen was perfectly aware that her readers would see through to the magnificent compliment she thus paid to her favourite novelist.

On the other hand, there could scarcely be imagined three more silly females than Catherine Morland or Marianne and Mrs. Dashwood. They come straight from the old novels, but how magically transformed. There is no coldness in either picture, only the mother-love of a sympathetic and understanding creator. Fanny Burney left in much more conventional "sensibility"; so that we lose touch with Evelina in our impatience over her transports and agonies towards a "lost" father; and can scarcely wade through the emotional tortures of Cecilia's prolonged distraction.

Nevertheless, Miss Austen's "sensibilities" *are* made from fiction. They came "out of a book," or many books—as we see them in *Love and Friendship*.

The true foundation of sensibility was a perception of the fine shades and instant responsiveness to them. But even its most eminent practitioner, Mrs. Radcliffe, was quite aware of the risk.

Thus spoke St. Aubert to his orphan daughter :—

> "Above all, my dear Emily, do not indulge in the pride of fine feeling, the romantic error of amiable minds. Those who really possess sensibility ought early to be taught that it is a dangerous quality, which is continually extracting the excess of misery or delight from every surrounding

* We find the orthodox view plainly set down in Mrs. Opie's *Adeleine Mowbray*. "Her feelings of delicacy were too strong to allow her to sigh for a man who evidently had no thoughts of sighing for her." Thus it becomes a heroine to resolve !

> circumstance. . . . We become the victim of our feelings, unless we can in some degree command them . . . for happiness arises in a state of peace, not of tumult; it is of a temperate and uniform nature; and can no more exist in a heart that is continually alive to minute circumstances than in one that is dead to feeling. You see, my dear, that, though I would guard you against the dangers of sensibility, I am not an advocate for apathy. At your age I should have said *that* is a vice more hateful than all the errors of sensibility, and I say so still. . . . Beware, my love, I conjure you, of that self-delusion which has been fatal to the peace of many persons—beware of priding yourself on the gracefulness of sensibility; if you yield to this vanity, your happiness is lost for ever. . . . Do not, however, confound fortitude with apathy; apathy cannot know the virtue."

There was "real sensibility" in Henry Tilney's confused apologies to Mrs. Morland; in Catherine's restraint from tears before Elinor when she was driven from the Abbey; and in her generosity towards Isabella, despite disillusion. If Marianne, certainly, encouraged "the self-delusion of priding herself on the gracefulness of sensibility"; she is redeemed by her warm heart—"That her sister's affections were calm she dared not deny, though she blushed to acknowledge it; and of the strength of her own she gave a very striking proof by still loving and respecting that sister in spite of this mortifying conviction."

Sensibility always enjoyed its wildest transports at the first sight of a "real friend"—"we flew into each other's arms and after having exchanged vows of mutual friendship for the rest of our lives, instantly unfolded to each other the most inward secrets of our heart"; as Laura said of her Sophia.

"You know," said Isabella Thorpe, "I carry my notions of friendship pretty high. . . . I quite doted on you the first moment I saw you. . . You are so

infinitely dearer to me, my Catherine, than either of my sisters."

So wrote Mrs. Opie of her heroine : " the heart of Adeleine was formed for violent and lasting attachments only " ; while Charlotte Lennox (author of *The Female Quixote*) epitomised the whole conception in one immortal phrase : *" a thought strikes me, let us swear an eternal friendship."*

But for the Dashwoods, this love *in* friendship has been submerged into the more natural, and tender, vividness of family affection. To Marianne always her mother was the deepest, most genuine and permanent object of devotion, from whom no stress of agony or transport of delight could weaken the appeal. Because she loved her sister, that sister's lover, the tame Edward, " was the only person in the world who could at that moment be forgiven for not being Willoughby " ; and she *almost* forgot her own broken heart, in wondering contemplation of Elinor's quiet distress.

Mrs. Dashwood, perhaps, offers a unique example of the most youthful " sensibility " prolonged into " middle life." But the child in her becomes her chief charm. There is a letter in *Love and Friendship*, by a strange coincidence addressed to Marianne, which illustrates, in marked contrast, the more *usual* consequences of romance in maturity :—

" A sensibility too tremblingly alive to every affliction of my friends, my acquaintance, and particularly to every affliction of my own, was my only fault, if a fault it could be called. Alas ! how altered now ! Tho' indeed my own misfortunes do not make less impression on me than they ever did, *yet now I never feel for those of another."*

Mrs. Dashwood may have remained more ridiculous ; but how infinitely more a woman and a mother !

If Mrs. Radcliffe is said to have "invented" Lord Byron, we might almost suggest that the romance-writers "invented" Fanny Burney. Her diaries reveal, on every page, the superiority of mind and the essential refinement which are the subtlety of that old-world grace of sensibility; indicating the well-bred, the elegant, and the fastidious. Actually we love Fanny for her quick, shy, emotions; and if her heroines affront or annoy us by their weaker "susceptibility" (that so absurdly unfits them for action or speech), I like to fancy that Jane Austen drew Marianne Dashwood rather from Fanny Burney herself than from Evelina or Cecilia; thereby revealing a power of reading *through* art, that only an artist could achieve.

I have suggested that, as Miss Austen grew older and more expert, she also thought and felt more gently. As she thus gained more mastery over her art, which was the old art of story-telling, the humanising of fiction-types is continuously more marked. We find more of the woman, less of the critic-parodist. Still her heart and her observation are applied to the old material; they are not themselves her purpose or her inspiration. Every detail of her development confirms this interpretation; among others the striking fact that, in the later novels, she works almost entirely on Fanny Burney or the greater writers; no longer at play with small fry.

Following the indication of its title we see how closely *Pride and Prejudice* has been built up from *Cecilia*; as the opposition of temperaments that here first separates hero and heroine is more subtly used in *Persuasion*. As the pompous man of family, Mr. Delville, reappears in General Tilney and Sir Walter Elliot; as Emma's imprudent friendship for Harriet recalls Cecilia's condescension towards Henrietta Bel-

field, who dreams as fondly and foolishly over Delville's imagined partiality as ever Harriet did over Knightley's.

The outlines of *Cecilia* and of *Pride and Prejudice* are, indeed, identical. Delville, like Darcy, fell in love against his family instincts, and, with even more offensive condescension, discoursed at length on his struggles between pride and passion, to the young lady he desired to honour with his affection. He, too, resisted long, yielded in the end, and was forgiven. His mother's appeal to Cecilia was as violent, and almost as impertinent, as Lady Catherine's to Elizabeth.

The resemblance, moreover, can be detected again and again in phrase and in some detail of the situation. But, whereas Miss Burney's plot turns on what may be called a " forced " perversity in the terms by which Cecilia inherited her great wealth, Miss Austen's is worked out from the normal conditions of social life in her day. The lovers do not exaggerate their emotions, or torment themselves beyond reason. There is no melodrama in the *dénouement*. Because they are handled more sympathetically ; because they are more true to nature and life ; they are more real to us, and more sure of our affection. The realism is directed to the " improvement " of romance.

Miss Austen, in fact, has once more used her " sense " to qualify her " sensibility," discarding the sensationalism (of Mr. Harrel's suicide), and the soul-tortures of unbridled despair to which Cecilia abandons herself ; replacing the crude caricatures of Miss Larolles and the " smart set," by the humours of the Bennet *ménage*.

In the same way, *Emma* owes much to the side issue, given at great length, of the unfortunate Henrietta. After all, most of the incidents spring from Harriet,

who is clearly linked on to the unwelcome attentions of Mr. Elton, the sprightly and misleading confidences of Frank Churchill, the steady devotion of Mr. Knightley. Yet all the stage secrecy and the more vulgar misunderstandings with which Miss Burney surrounds the episode, have been replaced by a natural series of rather foolish heart-to-heart talks between two charming girl friends.

We have hinted at a change of attitude in *Mansfield Park* from the "lifted" tale of Lydia Bennet; and, in many ways, this novel is Miss Austen's most "modern" work. We may admit a certain *naïveté* in Mary and Henry Crawford, as visitors from the great world; we may regret the somewhat old-fashioned and conventional moralising upon parental neglect and the rewards of virtue. Heavily "conscious of errors in his own conduct," Sir Thomas learned to console himself by contemplating "the general goodness of his intentions by Fanny . . . His charitable kindness had been rearing a prime comfort for himself." We note, too, that "Lady Bertram did not think deeply, but, guided by Sir Thomas, she thought justly on all important points; and she saw therefore, in all its enormity, what had happened, and neither endeavoured herself, nor required Fanny to advise her, to think little of guilt and infamy." At the worst, she could never have repeated Mrs. Bennet's vulgar parade of her disgracefully married daughter.

Is it perverse, indeed, to detect the real Jane Austen, just where she does not permit herself to follow her own heart? I refuse to believe that, in her own mind, she wanted to hold out against Henry Crawford,*

* Mlle. Villard, by a strange coincidence, has also worked out in some detail the "contradictions" of Henry Crawford in *Portraits of the Gentry*.

remembering how beautifully he read aloud! Against her feelings and her intuitive knowledge of human nature, she has made a concession to those whose real, if narrow-minded, goodness she had certainly the insight to respect.

I do not mean that she would ever have allowed Fanny to accept Henry *after* crime itself. *Her* character is consistent throughout, *his* is not. Miss Austen could not forget the wicked uncle, the lasting influence of a carelessly spent youth. Her plan for *Mansfield Park* was to humanise by realistic methods, the old plot of criminal characters (mildly criminal, as she would have them) disturbing a simple domestic scene—as we find them in *The Vicar of Wakefield*. But carried away by generous affection for the handsome villain she had so carefully brought to life, she lends Henry Crawford a *real* delicacy of mind, a spontaneous appreciation of goodness, a sympathy that is whole-hearted and—may I say—the seal of genuine "conversion"; as we see it towards William, Susan, and Mr. Price himself. Actually, this "new" man, who yet grew naturally out of the old, would never have even felt the "small" vanity that was his undoing; would certainly *not* have found "the temptation of immediate pleasure too strong for a mind unused to make any sacrifice to right." Miss Austen in fact, drags him back, with artistic insincerity, to her original conception of his place in the plot.

Nor can I believe she was speaking, without some half-formed regret or a smothered smile, when she declared that "the happiness of the married cousins must appear as secure as earthly happiness can be." Jane Bennet and the complaisant Bingley did "talk of giving" the Wickhams "a hint to be gone"; but

which of us could face a week with Edmund and his "dear little Fanny?"

Looking backward, however, we see clear evidence in *Mansfield Park* of Miss Austen's steady advance upon its predecessors. There is dramatic power in Mrs. Norris; a complex personality in Mary Crawford, whose moral "relapse" is quite sound. Sir Thomas Bertram proves himself a fine gentleman by the liberal courtesy of his refusal to press Crawford upon Fanny against her inclinations. That he could find leisure at *such* a time, to order a fire "every day" in her room, adds the last touch of simple truth to life, which is Miss Austen's supreme possession. If, on the other hand, we may feel that she has been somewhat brutal towards "society in Portsmouth, where the men appear all coarse, the women all pert, everybody underbred"; the dramatic effect of contrast has its value, and, maybe, the whole description explains her expressed ambition to marry the poet Crabbe!

When we reach *Persuasion*, there is, surely, no need to labour our proof. Anne was haunted, she admits, by Miss Larolles, when she "moved to the end of the form"—to avoid missing Captain Wentworth. Her dislike of Mr. Elliot for his want of frankness, revives the severity towards Jane Fairfax for similar, and less guilty, reserve; the plot is still based on sisters and, once more, Captain Wentworth is gently reproved for "accepting the attentions of two young women at once." The heroine's happiness and her misery again depend on her "superior" refinement in a vulgar family.

But, even apart from the hints at autobiography of emotion that none can miss, Jane Austen herself, the artist and the woman, has here come unmistakably to life and will live for us through all time.

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The "last message" from the "faithful" woman (who yet believes "men capable of everything great and good in their married lives"; —"I should deserve utter contempt if I dared to suppose that true attachment and constancy were known only by woman"), crowns the hundred years of hitherto suppressed self-utterance, that first found voice when Fanny Burney made it decent for women to write, and read, novels; revealing a fundamental difference in emotional outlook between the sexes, that more modern, and propagandist, analysis too often denies.

Testimony crowds to the mind of the innumerable points showing progress towards depth of feeling and subtler art; compared with her predecessors and her own earlier work.

If Sir Walter Elliot completes her gallery of foolish fathers, it has been seldom noticed that his late wife "promoted his real respectability for seventeen years," and "had been anxiously giving her daughters good principles and instruction." The "steady age and character" of Lady Russell, who "loved Anne better than she loved her own abilities," made her as admirable a substitute as one could imagine, for the lost mother; in spite of the error of judgment by which she initiated the plot. Admiral and Mrs. Croft are as ideal as any elderly couple could well be; while Mrs. Musgrove is most respectable, and—like Mrs. Dashwood—convincingly sincere in her mother-love.

The criticism we have ventured upon towards *Mansfield Park* may be justified by marked development that would refute it in *Persuasion*. As the naïve villainies of a Wickham or a Willoughby were there replaced by the mismanaged persuasiveness of an accomplished man of the world; we here find William Elliot—the Worldly-Wise-Man—complete and finished;

the able cunning of Mrs. Clay whose "affections," nevertheless, "overpowered her interest"; the "general and joint extravagance," fast living and easy virtue, of the "amusing" Mrs. Wallis and her friends, with its undercurrent of "hard-hearted indifference" towards the sufferings of those they despise without cause.

Our sympathies here are rather emotional than intellectual. There is perhaps less wit, but more humour. It is, emphatically, a subtle, and tender, character-study; moving beneath the surface, capturing us more by feeling and atmosphere than by incident. The construction has gained balance and compactness; the neat, swift, dialogue and description, if softened, are no less vigorous and smooth; the perfectly turned phrases outdo perfection.

If all the characters, and every incident, is now informed with humane humanity from the writer's own warm heart and keen eye; there are a hundred instances of greater artistic subtlety and a realism that carries us far from the bold shrewdness of *Love and Friendship*. Perhaps one example will suffice.

When Captain Wentworth has once more learnt that all his happiness depends on Anne, we hear him honestly convinced that "to his eye she could never alter." Yet he *had* said "she was so altered he should not have known her again."

"Anne smiled, and let it pass. It was too pleasing a blunder for a reproach. It is something for a woman to be assured, in her eight-and-twentieth year, that she has not lost one charm of her earlier youth: but the value of such homage was inexpressibly increased to Anne, by comparing it with former words, and *feeling it to be the result, not the cause, of a revival of his warm attachment.*"

How many writers, I wonder, have read so clearly a lover's heart ?

Can we doubt that the genius of Jane Austen had its birth in the love and the criticism of books ; that it matured through her love of man ?

The essential value and importance of Mlle. Villard's intriguing study of Jane Austen is derived from the manner and the point of view with which a distinguished French critic approaches so characteristically English a writer of genius. Her enthusiasm is discriminating ; her knowledge is intimate in the extreme. Nor, indeed, has any English writer attempted what one might call so technical an analysis of Jane Austen's psychology and style.

There is, moreover, a special interest attached to Mlle. Villard's shrewd reading of " The English Gentry," as seen through these novels, by a sympathetic foreign observer ; and if her French training, naturally, leads her to interpret what Scott calls the " calculating prudence of Miss Austen's views on ' Love and Marriage ' " as the almost universal woman's view (opposed to " the imaginary qualities in which man has decked her ") ; we find the statement primarily put forward as a sound criticism of *novels* by men.

Mlle. Villard, indeed, supports in almost every particular the interpretation which I have endeavoured to establish above of Jane Austen's genius. Hers is not " Art for the sake of Beauty " or even " Art for Truth's sake " ; but is " above all Art for the sake of the pleasure she took in certain aspects of life." She has no desire whatever to " edify " or " instruct " ; and " her attitude is that of a being for whom the whole romantic movement meant nothing at all, of

a being interested in humanity alone." What I have called her deep love for human individuals Mlle. Villard, too, recognises as the "philosophy" not expressed but plainly inspiring her work. "Because she herself has experienced the kindness of life she is never in opposition to life which, on the contrary, she always represents as good, sweet and worthy to be lived with love and joy."

Mlle. Villard proves rather *too* much by stating that all the heroes are copied from books, and that Jane Austen only read romances "in order to learn what faults to avoid in writing," but both statements confirm the view, which she everywhere maintains, that the "realism" is not modern or propagandist, but due to a keen eye for the "false" sentiment and characterisation of her predecessors.

To this important critical estimate, Mlle. Villard added (in her thesis when standing for the Doctorial Degree) a record of Jane Austen's "Life," which nearly doubled the length of her work. She has given me, however, full permission to use my own judgment in selection or abridgment for translation; and I am confident that these chapters have little, or no value, for English readers. Indeed, the late Mr. William Austen-Leigh expressed great pleasure on hearing that I was arranging for a translation of Mlle. Villard's *appreciation,* but he was gravely dissatisfied with several misjudgments in the *Life;* also condemned in *Personal Aspects of Jane Austen* by Mary Augusta Austen-Leigh. The erroneous charge of "indifference" to Religion has been omitted from this translation as being too dogmatically, and sweepingly, expressed.

JANE AUSTEN AND HER WORK

BY

LÉONIE VILLARD

CHAPTER I

WOMEN, LOVE AND MARRIAGE

SMILING and very much alive, sometimes half-concealing her grace beneath a veil of shyness, or cloud of melancholy, a young girl is invariably the heroine of a novel by Jane Austen.

Around her there gravitates a small collection of idle or useless persons, friends or relations, suitors who are to be taken seriously and others who can only be laughed at, while across the background figures are seen to pass rapidly by, figures which have been dashed off with one stroke, yet always interesting, and sometimes deliciously comic. If nearly all the characters of Jane Austen seem to belong to reality because their gestures, attitudes and conversations are all true to life, none but the heroines yield up their full personality to us.

With the heroine alone we penetrate to the secret of the mind.

We may hear her debating with herself, she lets us know the secrets that she dare not formulate aloud, her opinions of those around her, the fluctuations of their opinions, in a word we are made aware in her of everything by which consciousness prepares for action, renders it possible, then inevitable.

Emma, Elizabeth and Fanny think aloud before us and thus we receive involuntary confidences about

things which no one would ever suspect, not even the girl's best friend, he who later on is to become the companion of her life.

Living in surroundings which vary only very slightly, resisting outside influences with the different powers of different characters and personalities reacting according to the law of her temperament and of her natural bent, each heroine gives us a fresh attitude in the face of reality.

She possesses a distinctive physiognomy, at the decisive hours of her life she can find a novel and original solution to her own problems. Yet we find beneath the variations and fine shades of personality a sort of spiritual relationship which links her with the other young creations of Jane Austen.

The fact is that in spite of the very subtle shades of difference which give Emma Woodhouse and Anne Elliot a rather higher social rank than Elizabeth Bennet or Ellinor Dashwood, the heroines of the six novels belong to the same class, that of the "gentry."

And what is still more significant, they belong to the same moral family, represent and express the same feminine ideal.

There is no doubting that they belong to their period, as much by their clothes as by their mental processes, their prejudices and their scruples.

They wear the fashions of a certain epoch—even more—of a certain year with a discreet elegance which has exactly the right note, not only in their gowns but in the preferences of their minds and hearts.

In 1798 they read Cowper, and are astonished that anyone can hear the verses of their favourite poet without deep emotion.

They discuss the theories of picturesque beauty and of romance in the style of Mrs. Radcliffe: in 1814

they acclaim the valour of the Navy, speak of Mr. Scott and Lord Byron, hesitate as to whether they prefer *Marmion* to the *Lady of the Lake*, and can quote the beauties of the *Giaour* or of the *Bride of Abydos*.

But though much of their charm belongs exclusively to their own day, the freshness of their beauty, the upright and noble moral character of their souls, their force of personality belong to all time.

The ideal woman of the English race has always been dowered with these same qualities by the imagination of poets and novelists. And these heroines of Jane Austen, girls of average conditions of life, who know nothing of tragedy, nor of great agonising passion ; flowers of the open air growing in a garden which is sheltered from the wild winds of heaven, are yet closely related to the noble creatures ; princesses from afar, and faery queens created by the genius of Shakespeare.

Within the park palings, or the old paternal home, these young girls who know nothing of the world, but are kind, upright and sensible, seem to us to be the rather bourgeoise and formal little sisters (charming and refined, however) of Rosalind, Silvia or Beatrice, whose lofty beauty, and tender, witty, haughty grace bloomed in some enchanted garden-setting of Italy, or in the green woods, the forest of Arden.

In writing her first books Jane Austen spontaneously adopted a method of procedure which later on in the full maturity of her talent she recommended to one of her nieces : that of passing rapidly over the childhood and awkward age of her heroine, for according to one of her letters, she believed that the charm and interest of the book could not be fully developed until the heroine became a young girl who has " come out " and is considered grown-up.

She borrowed nothing from those authors, forgotten to-day, of many ephemeral romances which wiled away leisure hours at Steventon. But at least she learnt to avoid their errors of form, thanks to the long, slow, fastidious descriptions of the character and education of the heroes of them. When the unfolding of the plot demands it, or when it is necessary to lay particular stress on some point of character, Jane Austen will give a rapid sketch of the heroine's childhood.

Thus, in *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland's education forms the subject of the first chapter, and in *Mansfield Park* we see how Fanny Price, abruptly transplanted from Portsmouth to the country, becomes gradually acclimatised to her new surroundings.

We have only very slight information as to the lives of the other heroines before the moment that they are presented to us.

By a sort of dramatic short-cut which give her novels the very flavour of reality, the past, the influences of education, the reaction of environment on character and personality, do not seem to be dead and distant things, but live forces which make Elizabeth Bennet, Fanny or Emma what they are at the very moment we watch them move before our eyes.

Putting aside passing fantasies born of sentimentality, these girls are all perfectly natural, lively or pensive according to the greater or smaller element of joy in themselves or their lives. But gaiety, serenity, hope and good humour are almost invariably the dominant notes of their characters.

It is as if a sunbeam shone from their glances and smiles. They are happy not only because life is kind to them, but because they are perfectly adapted to their environment, and because they accept their

pleasant but monotonous destinies without one vain desire or useless aspiration. Their fine mental and physical equilibrium does not admit of anxiety or impatience. They can amuse themselves with very little, and can fill their days with still less: with a walk, a gossip, or some reading.

In Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse the two gayest and most brilliant heroines, whose joy in living is tempered by the pleasure of learning and by the effort to understand life, we find the qualities which characterise their race at its happiest moments.

Like Rosalind in *As You Like It*, and Portia, in *The Merchant of Venice*, they are only "untutored, unlessoned" girls and yet by the power of intuition they are enabled to realise the marvel of choosing and desiring the very things which are for their true well-being. Like Beatrice, in *Much Ado about Nothing*, a star danced when they were born.

These creatures are made for happiness and therefore are able to create it by instinct. Elizabeth, with nothing better to amuse her than the society of Merryton, finds material both for reflection and for making fun in the ridiculous sides of Sir William Lucas and Mr. Collins.

Emma Woodhouse, living with an old father who is subject to harmless obsessions, with no friend of her own age, believes herself the most fortunate of girls and cannot conceive of any pleasanter form of existence.

Yet this joyful harmony which so largely makes up the characters of Elizabeth and Emma is far removed from any resemblance to the vulgar, sanctimonious passive satisfaction which a less delicate and intelligent nature might feel.

Lydia, Elizabeth's younger sister, and Harriet Smith, Emma's protégée rather than friend, make us fully aware of the difference between the pleasure of going out into society prettily dressed and adequately admired by pleasant young men, and the pleasure which is derived from intelligent observation of the spectacle of life.

Ellinor Dashwood, Fanny Price, and Anne Elliot give evidence of possessing the same sort of tastes and qualities as Elizabeth and Emma, but they are expressed and given vent to with less brilliance and enthusiasm.

To the lustre of Emma and Elizabeth, the other three add the poignant charm of pliable grace, the charm of fragility. The too uniform tone all through *Pride and Prejudice* (which Jane Austen noticed herself), also to be observed in lesser degree in *Emma*, is due to the fact that plot and characters alike are marked in without enough shadow, or half-tone, all in crude colours in a high key, without reflections and without depth.

The characters of Ellinor, Fanny and Anne Elliot, on the contrary, are painted with rare subtlety of tone.

With the exception of Anne Elliot, these heroines are as young as Elizabeth and Emma, but they are more truly *women*, because they have richer and more complex personalities.

Elizabeth's somewhat biting conversation, like the reasoning and deduction of Emma, reduces itself more or less to variations on one theme, while with Ellinor and Anne we are in communication with intelligence and sensibility, far more diversified and more delicately shaded. Ellinor is not only, as one might gather from the book's title, the incarnation

of balance and common sense. Gracious and gentle, as well as sensible, she shows us that Reason in a young Athene, dressed in the fashions of 1798, is essentially an amiable quality.

Ellinor can look gently on the faults and follies of the people around her.

She can be amused, without getting contemptuous and enjoying her contempt.

She can smile indulgently on stupidity; she can even smile in the face of disillusion and the bitterness of disappointed love.

Reserve and self-respect are her armour against the scurvy tricks of a rival, or the caprice of Destiny, and among all her charming sisters Ellinor is the girl who best expresses in herself that innate modesty in the expression of emotion, which so often guards the inmost heart and mind of an Englishwoman from careless eyes.

To the pride of Ellinor Dashwood, Fanny Price adds the exquisite grace of a being whose moral force is inevitably united with a touching demand on another's greater strength, a great need of tenderness and protection.

The charm of a woman and the sweetness of a child are combined in her, and if we cannot but be fond of all Jane Austen's heroines, Fanny Price alone hears the caressing words of love, tender words which lull and console.

Facing life unarmed, delivered up to the influence of wills stronger than her own, because of her natural timidity and the subjection in which she has been brought up, she makes use of her own gentleness to disarm her uncle, and to repel the advances of a suitor whom she cannot love. To be reasonable, full of common sense, or noble, are the qualities most admired

in other heroines ; but an almost child-like innocence and timidity endear to us this " white violet " which has flowered in the shady copses of Mansfield Park.

The same creative inspiration which made Ellinor Dashwood a heroine of romance, yet enlightened by unusual good sense, makes Fanny Price far more than a soft and passive creature, only fit to be cherished or scolded alternately by those who have rights over her.

Whether she is moving about the great rooms of the manor house, or amid the sordid setting of her father's home, Fanny passes silently and with light footstep on her way, occupied with something useful, never ceasing to pursue her only aim with all the energy and intelligence at her command, that of gaining, if not the passionate love, then at least the affection of the man to whom she has given her heart.

The heroine of *Persuasion,* that Anne Elliot, whose beauty is slightly faded by the passing of the years, is not the less touching on that account, indeed gains in complexity thereby.

The radiant but perhaps rather fixed smile of Elizabeth Bennet or Emma, the grave, proud grace of Ellinor, the sweetness of Fanny, every variation of the exclusively feminine qualities are to be found in the character of this Anne Elliot, whom the author considered " almost too perfect." Too perfect she is not, since she brought herself through rather cowardly submission to the wishes of an old friend to reject the great love that was offered her, and since she knew the pangs of regret and almost of jealousy when in her turn she found herself disdained.

A unique example of her kind in Jane Austen's fiction, this heroine who is no longer very young, who is made to expiate the suffering she has caused in another before reaching happiness herself, appears to

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us, as though subtly moulded by experience and refined by life itself.

For this reason her beauty, though less dazzling, is far more deeply significant.

Elizabeth, Fanny, Emma or Ellinor, in spite of their youthful wisdom, have the fine sturdy confidence in themselves and everything else which belongs to those who have never felt grief. Anne Elliot, on the contrary, holds the memory of bitterness, of disillusion, in the depths of her eyes, and one may read it in the delicate line of her mouth.

With the younger girls we see the budding, the blossoming, of the heart, but in Anne we are shown a still more stirring marvel, the second blooming of beauty and joy.

Passing from the faith in life of these first heroines to the rather saddening charm of Anne Elliot, Jane Austen is not so much giving us opposing aspects of woman's character as a study of different stages of her development. Anne Elliot is what Emma or Elizabeth or Fanny might have become at the end of their first youth if love and experience had wounded them in the process of ripening them.

But whether radiant and triumphant, or charming through sadness, they all belong to the same circle; they have received the same education, are imbued with the same ideas, the same principles.

Even though the social atmosphere belongs to a higher rank and though the setting is rather more luxurious in the novels written at Chawton, there is yet only a difference of degree between the comfort in which the Bennets live and the wealth of the Bertrams or Elliots.

All Jane Austen's heroines have been brought up in the same way, whether squires' or baronets'

daughters : the way in which Mrs. Austen brought up her daughters at Steventon.

From the scanty information as to the childhood of Emma or Fanny, one may pick out details which explain certain aspects of their character ; and at the same time—as Jane Austen always works from reality—collect interesting knowledge of the customs of the day.

At that time, while little girls of the humbler classes were educated in boarding-schools such as that described in Emma, the education of the daughters of Mr. Bennet, Mr. Woodhouse, and Sir Thomas Bertram, was carried out under the direction of mother or governess. In any case, it was not necessary for them to learn much.

They were encouraged to read, they were given all the necessary teachers, but if they were pleased to be idle no one would object. When, like Catherine Morland, they were fond of reading works which do not contain one serious thought they could do so at their leisure. The knowledge to be obtained from their books was not likely to do them much good or much harm. If they should acquire a few false notions from reading sentimental novels, experience will soon dissipate them.

They have no need to learn pieces from " Elegant Extracts," by heart, for the guidance of their lives ; they need to learn judgment and sound reasoning, and to distrust imagination and the pitfalls laid by sensibility. Naturally sensible, like Elizabeth or Ellinor, they know by instinct which of two courses of conduct they ought to adopt.

And if, like Emma and Marianne, they have more intelligence and feeling than judgment, they will make slips, serious mistakes even, and experience

will teach them, at their own expense, to behave more judiciously in the future.

Thus quite early in life they gain a sense of their own responsibility, absolute sincerity with their own minds and a lively notion of the connection between cause and effect.

Elizabeth, for instance, declares that she does not play the piano very well because she has never taken the trouble to practise very much :—

> "My fingers do not move over this instrument in the masterly manner which I see so many women's do. They have not the same force or rapidity, and do not produce the same expression. But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault—because I could not take the trouble of practising. It is not that I do not believe *my* fingers as capable as any other woman's of superior execution."

The education that these girls receive is addressed more particularly to the judgment than to the intellect.

It is true that Marianne Dashwood likes reading, and especially a poet like Cowper.

Anne Elliot can discuss the respective merits of Scott and Byron with the sentimental Captain Berwick, and recommends the young man to read the works of the moralists, the lives and letters of persons celebrated for their own worth or for the trials they have experienced.

But both girls are more cultivated than girls generally are in that circle, besides Marianne strives to feed her exaggerated sentimentality from the "moving" verses of Cowper, while sweet Anne Elliot seeks oblivion and consolation in the works of poets and moralists.

Education has not interfered in the least with the individuality of these young girls.

Strict discipline has only been brought to bear in one direction, that of social etiquette. The Bertram

sisters very soon forget—and who could blame them—those precious scraps of knowledge such as the names of planets or of famous philosophers, but they are never tired of practising their piano duets, those brilliant pieces for four hands, and when they are of an age to "come out," they should thus be able to cut good figures as accomplished Society girls.

During the first few years of the nineteenth century Swift's aphorism on the education of women was certainly true :

"Girls are taught to make nets not cages."

They have nice manners, embroider landscapes in coloured silks, draw or paint little landscapes, and thus fortified against possible loneliness and inevitable old age, they make their entrance into the world at the age of seventeen.

This sort of education—to which Jane Austen draws attention without comment—has no disastrous results except for the foolish and the vain.

In the Bennet family, where all the girls have been brought up alike, Mary, who has read big books of which she understands nothing, has ridiculous pretensions to a great mind, while the idle and frivolous Lydia has taken advantage of the liberty which has been left her, by neglecting to learn anything, and from the moment that she is old enough to go to balls thinks of nothing any more but the officers of the garrison at Meryton. Jane and Elizabeth, on the contrary, have been preserved from the affectation of Mary and the vulgarity of Lydia by their natural good sense and good taste.

At Mansfield Park the two daughters of Sir Thomas Bertram and his niece Fanny Price receive the same lessons and share the same life in every way, but Maria and Julia quite early in their careers acquire a

sense "that they are destined to become the finest girls in the county," and as their manners are full of affability and obligingness, they receive unanimous praise and imagine that they have not a fault.

From the moment that love appears in the lives of the heroines, the first time that they have to make a decision of the first importance on which their happiness depends, their strength of character and the value of their education is put to the test. Arrived at this point, Jane Austen does not offer the reader those conclusions upon an education all directed to the social side of life, which she has hitherto abstained from formulating ; she is content to give us the facts, leaving us to point a moral if we are so disposed. And if we try to penetrate fully into the meaning of events which happen to Elizabeth, or Maria, or Julia, or Fanny Price, or Emma Woodhouse, we find out that, for Miss Austen, any education which does not concentrate on developing the common sense and love of truth and right-thinking which every normal being ought to possess—has achieved *nothing* and is worthless.

Among the heroines of hers, all brought up in the same way as far as the social side is concerned, some imperil or destroy all their chances of happiness, while others ensure happy and worthy lives for themselves.

Some allow themselves to be so far carried away by vanity or folly, that nothing in their education can counterbalance the strong will of nature and temperament, while others react instinctively against everything that is bad or false, and owe these reactions entirely to the clarity of their own minds and the force of their own characters.

It is not surprising that in a set of novels written by a woman love plays a great part. But Jane Austen shows us love, and studies its influence in a new and original light which is at the same time profoundly true.

Up to then, love had been regarded in the novels of Richardson and Fielding, as well as those of Mrs. Radcliffe and Miss Burney, under the two principal aspects in which men appear to see it, and not as it seems in the eyes of women. As idealised sentiment or physical passion it had been depicted, even by the women writers, just as it was conceived of and analysed by the great master-novelists at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

In *Evelina* Miss Burney had not dreamt of deviating from the traditional portrayal of love which, since *Clarissa Harlowe*, formed the very foundation of a sentimental or romantic novel.

Her work, which in other directions is so essentially feminine, is far otherwise—except for her delicacy and reserve—in this salient point—the portrayal of love.

Perhaps because the authoress is more at her ease in studying action rather than character, in reproducing language, gestures and attitudes rather than the evolutions of a soul, psychology—and, above all, the psychology of love—is entirely lacking in *Evelina* and *Cecilia*. Miss Burney's heroines can certainly experience the tender passion, and are as much experts at repelling the advances which displease them as they are at encouraging the men of their hearts.

But there is nothing more in that than an adroit manœuvre or an innocent ruse. We learn nothing there of the most important point of the matter, the motives which guide a girl in her choice of her betrothed, the promptings of both mind and heart which impel her towards love.

Having fallen in love at first sight with a handsome stranger, Evelina, like Clarissa and Sophia Western, is simply in love with love.

The truth which Jane Austen is the first to bring forward is that the majority of women regard love in quite another fashion.

Studying woman's soul from within, she does not hesitate to paint it as it generally is.

Ruthlessly she despoils it of the imaginary qualities in which man has decked it when he formulates conclusions which cannot be either disinterested or due to direct observation.

And her sincere and penetrating analysis is so fine that we need not regret the mirages of tenderness, love's illusion, nor the rancour and hatred which man has been known to bring to the study of a soul which he can never by any means thoroughly understand, being condemned to this taste of frustration through the very fact of his manhood's nature.

The genius of Shakespeare alone, up to this point, had divined the fact that even the greatest, noblest, tenderest love in a woman does not necessarily exclude all practical considerations, all links with everyday reality.

In the garden of the Capulets, while Romeo absorbs the beauty of the night and with it feeds the flame of the beauty of his own ecstasy, Juliet, never for a moment forgets the material considerations which tyrannise over love just as they do over all human affairs.

She suggests a trysting-place for the next day to Romeo, reminds him of the time and their danger of discovery, and in almost every word seems to attempt to capture and subdue the winged dream of the lover which is sailing beyond the limits of time and space,

so that she may reduce it to the common measure of earthly happiness.

This sense of reality which nothing will destroy in the average woman, which Shakespeare's genius has brought to light, has been presented as the essential element of love by Jane Austen in all her heroines.

Elizabeth, Ellinor and Fanny do not see love as the bringer of happy hours—hours of miraculous happiness—they intend to found the pleasure and prosperity of their whole lives upon it.

Being women, they are by instinct the founders and creators of the home. They know that love which has a good chance of lasting must be based on something other than the keen, but perhaps fleeting, sympathy roused by the beauty of a face, the notes of a voice, the charm of a smile.

Being healthy and sensible, they demand that love shall bring satisfaction to their minds and hearts.

Young as they are, they know quite well that love which is to find expression in marriage—and for these girls there is no other love—should be based on sympathy of views and tastes quite as much as upon considerations of position, and of means adequate to assure them of a comfortable and dignified life in their homes. They are also very much on their guard against being led astray by their hearts.

When they are tempted to fall in love, they remain perfectly capable of thinking the matter over calmly ; when they do plight their troths it is never lightly done, and then they make a voluntary gift of their tenderness, even more complete than if it had been made with less clear-sighted vision.

It is not that these girls are coldly calculating at the age of twenty. As is only natural to people of their age and experience, they are sometimes attracted by

only external advantages. At her first meeting with Wickham, the fascinating young officer whose uniform shows off his expressive face and fine figure to advantage, Elizabeth is delighted, and, what is more, she is very much flattered by the young man's attentions. Wickham occupies a place in her imagination for some time ; she thinks about him, believes that she could love him. If he were to ask her to be his wife, she would have perhaps accepted him, although Wickham's only means of subsistence, apparently, was his pay. But this flickering sentiment, depending as it did only on the good looks and attractive ways of the young officer, was extinguished as suddenly as it had caught fire when Wickham transferred his attentions from Elizabeth to an heiress. Elizabeth realizes at once that she had only thought she loved him.

The feeling had been composed of imagination and vanity.

She confesses this quite simply to her aunt :—

> " I am now convinced, my dear aunt, that I have never been much in love, for had I really experienced that pure and elevating passion I should at present detest his very name, and wish him all manner of evil. But my feelings are not only cordial towards *him*, they are even impartial towards Miss King. I cannot find out that I hate her at all. . . . There can be no love in all this. I should certainly be a more interesting object to all my acquaintances were I distractedly in love with him, but I cannot say that I regret my comparative insignificance.
>
> " Importance may sometimes be purchased too dearly. Kitty and Lydia take his defection more to heart than I do. They are young in the ways of the world, and are not yet open to the mortifying conviction that handsome young men must have something to live on as well as plain."

In the same way Emma Woodhouse takes satisfied vanity for love, and tries to believe that she is in love with Frank Churchill :—

"'I certainly must be,' she said, 'this sensation of listlessness, weariness, stupidity, this disinclination to sit down and enjoy myself, this feeling of everything being dull and insipid about the house—I must be in love; I should be one of the oddest creatures in the world if I were not for a few weeks at least . . . ' Emma continued to entertain no doubt of her being in love. Her ideas only varied as to how much. At first she thought it was a good deal. Afterwards very little.

A girl less intelligent than Emma and not so sensible as Elizabeth might have fallen into the trap of flattered vanity.

But—since Jane Austen makes absolute folly the exception—it is only those of her heroines who are blinded by pride or lack of judgment who fall into disaster.

Maria Bertram, courted for a few days by the irresistible Henry Crawford, finds herself suddenly left in the lurch.

Henry Crawford, certain that he has made a conquest of pretty Miss Bertram, considers that there is no more to be said or desired in the matter, and in his character of strictly platonic Don Juan he departs to find a fresh field of action.

Maria is upheld by pride in her disappointment :—

"After three or four days, when there was no return, no letter, no message—no symptom of a softened heart—no hope of advantage from separation, her mind became cool enough to seek all the comfort that pride and self-revenge could give.

"Henry Crawford had destroyed her happiness, but he should not know that he had done it, he should not destroy her credit, her appearance, her prosperity too. He should not have to think of her as pining in retirement at Mansfield for *him*—rejecting Sotherton and London, independence and splendour for his sake."

By the time Maria Bertram has become Mrs. Rushworth she quite understands that, even when Henry

Crawford was most pressing in his attentions, he had only been amusing himself with her.

Once married, she learns that he is honestly in love with Fanny Price.

Wounded pride, passion perhaps, but not love, prompt the haughty Maria to re-open the affair.

This time she plans the campaign with skill, and, by dint of assuming coldness and indifference as a spur to the fickle one's passions, she does awaken in him a capricious desire—though he remains in love with Fanny Price. Before long Maria, whose intrigue is as clear as daylight to everyone but her husband, has practically compelled Henry to elope to Scotland with her.

Maria's pride and rancour are satisfied, but she sacrifices a brilliant position in order to wreak her revenge and unite herself, if only for a moment, with a man who has never loved her.

It is not wounded pride and the bitterness of seeing her beauty despised which decides Lydia Bennet to fly with the attractive Wickham.

Lydia has no common sense, and her vigorous animality is so unconscious, so far removed from all perversity, that she seems like Miss Hoyden in *The Relapse, or Virtue in Danger*, quite incapable of lying or scheming.

There is no such evil for her as to be constrained to do anything that bores her.

Though lightly pencilled in, this portrait of a healthy young creature whose instincts and senses alone govern her actions, deserves a place beside that of Vanbrugh's heroine.

With a hundred years between them, they are the self-same type, though Lydia is a slightly softened and refined version, not only because a woman created her,

but because the manners of the "gentry" have improved and lost some coarseness between 1696 and 1797.

Grossness in speech and manners has been toned down little by little, both by the efforts of the moralists who preached virtue and as a result of the new ideals of society which enjoined pretty manners and decency of language.

Miss Hoyden expresses herself even more frankly than Lydia, and leaves none of her aspirations or intentions to one's imagination. It wearies her to be shut up in the country with her father and old nurse, and even more displeasing to her is the fact that she is not yet married, though she is only fifteen :—

> "It's well I have a husband coming, or i'cod I'd marry the baker!"

Lydia Bennet thinks just as she does, with this difference only, that her longing for a husband is all the keener because of the triumph that would be hers in being married first in the family although she is the youngest.

> "I was in great hopes," she says to Elizabeth, "that one of you would have got a husband before you came back. Jane will be quite an old maid soon, I declare. She is almost twenty-three! Lord! how ashamed I should be of not being married before twenty-three . . . Lord! how I should like to be married before any of you. Then I should chaperone you all about to balls."

When she runs off with Wickham, Lydia announces her escapade to a friend as "a good joke." Her fondness for her dear Wickham does not leave room for any thought but that of the pleasure of being with him.

She does not care in the least whether he marries her or not, since she can live with him without being his wife.

When the Bennet family succeed in arranging that the marriage shall take place, Wickham having consented on condition that his debts were paid, Lydia's pleasure is concentrated entirely in being able to show her wedding-ring and in hearing herself called "Mrs." instead of "Miss."

There is just and legitimate retribution in the fact that the illusions created by pride and folly may ruin a whole life, that Maria pays with the loss of social position and wealth for the triumph of a few days' re-conquest of a fickle heart, that Lydia's fondness quickly becomes indifference.

But it is a nobler and yet more cruel illusion which rouses sensibility and tenderness which are not governed and restrained by reason and common sense.

Like the exquisite Viola of Shakespeare, who, in *Twelfth Night*, loves the Duke from the first moment that her eyes fall on him, only Marianne Dashwood among all Jane Austen's irreproachably "steady" heroines, is rash enough to fall in love at first sight.

Chivalrous, handsome and cultivated, Willoughby entirely captivates her heart and mind. But it must be taken into consideration that though Viola's country is the sumptuous Italy, the land pre-eminently of gallantry, evoked by the imagination of a poet-artist, where princes court noble dames in vain, and console themselves by marrying the tenderest lover who has ever suffered for them or through them, Marianne, on the contrary, lives in the England of the eighteenth century. We do not see her in a fairylike setting, but in an ordinary country village where, as everywhere else here below, it is strictly necessary to know how to cut one's coat according to one's cloth.

From that fact alone a series of bitter disappointments are bound to befall this woman who is a lover,

a tender and palpitating lover, living entirely in a world of sheer feeling. She has given her heart to Willoughby, believes herself loved by him, and for a short time hopes to become his wife.

Yet this love which bloomed so naturally in her heart is too exclusive, too passionate for daily life. In spite of the prudent warnings of her sister, Ellinor, Marianne *will* not take into consideration that happiness in marriage *does* depend to a certain degree on such prosaic matters as money and position.

She clutches desperately at love.

When Willoughby abandons her she wants to die, unable to live without him.

However, the life-force is more tenacious in her than she knows. And as disappointment in love at eighteen must inevitably be softened and at last effaced by the passage of time, and because Jane Austen always shows us life as it is for the average human being, the day comes when Marianne welcomes another love very different from that which Willoughby inspired. A hard lesson has taught her the danger of trying to create an ideal world for the shelter of an exceptional love.

The sensibility in herself which she had encouraged to the utmost, which had made her sister's prudence seem cold and calculating, had betrayed her into suffering.

In order that she should appreciate the fact that reason and common sense are indispensable even in love, she had to pass through a cruel experience.

For if love is to be all feeling and imagination, a Dream-flower, instead of a Flower—not so lovely, perhaps, but also not so soon faded in the broad daylight of reality—it must engender disappointment and suffering. Marianne Dashwood, the only one of Jane

Austen's heroines whose heart gets the better of her judgment, after believing that her life is shattered for ever by the ruin of her dearest illusions, ends by contenting herself, as most people must in this world, with the average relative happiness and a love which her inexperience and passionate capacity for feeling had at first pronounced unacceptable.

With the exception of Marianne, all the heroines of Jane Austen are examples of the fact of being in love without being great lovers.

The hilltops and peaks of emotion are inaccessible regions for these women.

Their little feet feel too instinctively for the velvety turf of their lawns and parks to permit them any dangerous excursions into the unknown country of the passions.

To find love they would rather follow the familiar ways of friendship and tenderness. Very often indeed their love appears to them in the well-known guise of a friend of their childhood, a cousin long loved as a brother. It is by slow gradations and almost insensibly that their almost fraternal affection becomes love. An Emma or a Fanny Price only understands that she loves when she feels her love threatened and fears that she will no longer fill the first place in the heart and the thoughts of her first and best friend.

On what is this love founded—this love which is so deep in its calmness and tender security? It is founded, more than anything else, on the respect inspired by a being who possesses qualities not necessarily greater, but different to their own.

In spite of their independence of mind, their capacity for thought, reflection and making a decision, these heroines of Jane Austen do not feel that they are made to go through life alone.

They need protection and tenderness, and everyone of them, the most brilliant as well as the gentlest, is unable to conceive of a love which is not partly composed of admiration and esteem.

Elizabeth Bennet begins to love Darcy from the moment that she feels guilty of injustice and hardness towards him; Emma, who accepts the deference and homage around her with so triumphant a grace, only understands how dear Mr. Knightley has become to her when she compares the sound judgment and clear-sighted common sense of her best friend with her own blindness of vision.

In order that these women may truly love with all the depth of which their healthy upright beings are capable, they must have understood that Darcy or Mr. Knightley, their equals in intelligence and in moral qualities, are their superiors in the use they can make of that intelligence and of those qualities. Then it is that love and marriage appear to them not as renunciations, nor the yielding up of personality, but as the opening of a way to full development, to perfection of their beings.

But the moment when two beings made for mutual understanding—after much hesitation and misunderstanding—arrive at the agreement which is to decide the fate of both of them, is a moment fraught with so much complexity that it is hardly possible to give more than the barest indication of it. And then is there not some stiffness, some reserve—exceedingly superfluous, by the way—which puts a check on Jane Austen and prevents her, after minutely studying the budding and growth of tenderness in her heroines, from writing that

great scene of love and vows exchanged which *should* occupy the last chapters of her novels ?

Neither the reserve of a woman " of good family " nor the intuition of an incomparable artist can explain the fact that in a series of novels, every one of which is a love-story, this scene was never written, only indicated.

A few short sentences, a glance exchanged, then the definite answer which clears up all misunderstandings and brushes all fears away : that is all the *dénouement* we get to a whole psychological drama on a small scale.

Because this is the decisive moment in which all the aspirations of heart and mind are to be entirely realized or betrayed, the characters of these little dramas experience nothing at first but painful expectation, which is followed by a joy so full and satisfying that they have no need of words.

Indeed, this love surpasses the joy to be snatched from the present moment.

Jane Austen's heroines demand, and will obtain from it, since they have been capable of choosing it and waiting for it, a whole lifetime of calm felicity made sweet by the protection of one who is dear to them, whose affection will endure, for it is composed as much of respect as of tenderness.

If their conception of love is far removed from all passion, and should really be called conjugal friendship or comradeship, it is not only because the average woman is less dominated by feeling and imagination than she is generally supposed to be.

It is also because, very much creatures of their environment, they are accustomed to regard love not as an essential condition of all marriages, but as the element on which both the dignity and well-being of

the union greatly depends. In the England of the eighteenth century, and, above all, amongst the "gentry," it is only the married women who are looked up to and relatively independent.

The daughters of the "gentry" had not the resource of retiring to a convent, which is open to the daughters of the French aristocracy and upper classes, where they may rule over a little monastic hive if they have no hope of reigning as queen in the house of a husband.

For these English girls, then, marriage was a necessity, almost a duty towards themselves and their families.

If they could succeed in meeting someone to marry whom they could love, or did love at the moment of accepting him, their chances of happiness were thereby increased; but even without love, and short of feeling positive aversion, they had no right to refuse a suitor who could offer them a position which was suitable in the eyes of their world. Satiric as it is, the definition of marriage which Jane Austen gives in *Pride and Prejudice* is not far from expressing a great part of the truth.

> "Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want."

Elizabeth Bennet, in rejecting the offer of a suitor who could maintain her suitably, gives a greater proof of her disinterestedness than might be imagined at first sight.

It is more than the refusal of a ridiculous husband, it is on her part the rejection of an opportunity—possibly her only one—of establishing herself in the sort of position she is expected to occupy. And it is

not for want of having faced the necessity of consenting some day to a marriage of convenience that she dismisses Mr. Collins.

Emma Woodhouse alone can face spinsterhood with any real equanimity.

But, then, she is the girl to whom fate has allotted that wealth and independence which neither Elizabeth Bennet nor Anne Elliot, nor Fanny Price possess. When it is a question of choosing between a husband like Mr. Collins or remaining unmarried, Elizabeth does not hesitate.

She knows that she must choose between two evils, and decides in favour of the lesser one. When Fanny Price rejects the proposal of rich and brilliant Henry Crawford, Sir Thomas Bertram does not fail to inform his niece roundly that it is a piece of folly which she will regret all her life.

> " You think only of yourself, and because you do not feel for Mr. Crawford exactly what a young heated fancy imagines to be necessary for happiness you resolve to refuse him at once without wishing even for a little time to consider of it—a little more time for cool consideration, and for really examining your own inclinations, and are in a wild fit of folly throwing away from you such an opportunity of being settled in life, eligibly, honourably, nobly settled as will probably never occur to you again . . . and let me tell you, Fanny, that you may live eighteen years longer in the world without being addressed by a man of half Mr. Crawford's estate or a tenth part of his merits."

Emma Woodhouse, who by her position is above all these considerations of money which weighed so heavily in other cases, nevertheless only admits of spinsterhood as possible when voluntarily chosen by a rich woman.

To such a woman marriage would not bring all the fresh advantages that poor, or only fairly well-off, girls would derive from it.

Emma gives her views on this topic to her protégée, Harriet Smith :—

"I have none of the usual inducements of women to marry. Were I to fall in love indeed it would be a different thing, but I have never been in love ; it is not my way or my nature, and I do not think I ever shall. And without love, I am sure I should be a fool to change such a situation as mine. Fortune I do not want, employment I do not want, consequence I do not want ; I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house as I am of Hartfield ; and never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important ; so always first and always right in any man's eyes as I am in my father's."

"But then to be an old maid at last, like Miss Bates."

"That is as formidable an image as you could present, Harriet, and if I thought I should ever be like Miss Bates—so silly, so satisfied, so smiling, so prosing, so undistinguishing and unfastidious, and so apt to tell everything relative to everybody about me, I would marry to-morrow. But between us I am convinced there can never be any likeness except in being unmarried."

"But still, you will be an old maid—and that is so dreadful ! "

"Never mind, Harriet ! I shall not be a poor old maid, and it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public. A single woman with a very narrow income must be a ridiculous, disagreeable old maid—the proper sport of boys and girls ; but a single woman of good fortune is always respectable, and may be as pleasant and sensible as anybody else.

"And the distinction is not quite so much against the candour and common sense of the world as appears at first, for a very narrow income has a tendency to contract the mind and sour the temper . . ."

"Dear me ! But what shall you do ? How shall you employ yourself when you grow old ? "

"If I know myself, Harriet, mine is a busy, active mind, with a great many independent resources, and I do not perceive why I should be more in want of employment at forty or fifty than at twenty-one.

"Women's usual occupations of eye, hand and mind will be as open to me then as they are now, or with no important

variation. If I draw less, I shall read more; if I give up, music, I shall take to carpet-work. And as for objects of interest, objects for the affections, which is in truth the great point of inferiority, the want of which is really the great evil to be avoided in not marrying, I shall be very well-off with all the children of a sister I love so well to care about. There will be enough of them in all probability to supply every sort of sensation that declining life can need."

If celibacy is almost universally looked upon as a most undesirable state, in the case of an Elizabeth, an Anne Elliot, or a Fanny Price the strength of this opinion is subordinated to their conception of what they owe to themselves.

Their idea of duty, which does not include heroic sacrifice, but rather the small renunciations and concessions necessary for peace and harmony in everyday life, is perfectly right and sensible.

Without ever having formulated it, they put into practice that theory dear to individualism, to the will to live for one's own race; the idea that a duty to others always includes a duty towards oneself which is equally important.

Thus a girl who would consent to marry a man whom she knows to be inferior and unworthy of her, for the sake of comfort or luxury, would be failing in an essential duty, in spite of all appearances to the contrary.

Such a marriage would be only a bargain which would not turn out such a good bargain as she had estimated it.

In taking a step of that sort she must have closed her ears to the voice of judgment and have allowed herself to be carried away by vain ambition or the fear of becoming "a ridiculous and disagreeable old maid."

Sooner or later her judgment will take its revenge, and she will see that she has paid dearly for the name and position of a married woman, by having to spend

her whole life in the companionship with a man who has no ideas, tastes or sympathies in common with her.

Elizabeth Bennet refuses to marry Mr. Collins; while Charlotte Lucas soon manages to take possession of the despised heart of that excellent young man.

Charlotte announces her engagement to Elizabeth, and feeling sure that her friend will be surprised and aggrieved, she feels obliged to explain why she has accepted Mr. Collins :—

> "You must be surprised, very much surprised, so lately as Mr. Collins was wishing to marry you. But when you have had time to think it all over I hope you will be satisfied with what I have done. I am not romantic, you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins' character, connections and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair as most people can boast on entering the married state."

Jane Austen contents herself with merely suggesting by a few rapid expressive strokes the lesson to be learnt from marrying under conditions such as these; and we perceive from these how Charlotte's expectations were realized.

To be happy, the wife of Mr. Collins must learn to be satisfied with a very little happiness :—

> "Charlotte's first letters were received with a good deal of eagerness; there could not but be curiosity to know how she would speak of her new home, how she would like Lady Catherine, and how happy she would dare pronounce herself to be; though when the letters were read Elizabeth felt that Charlotte expressed herself on every point exactly as she might have foreseen. She wrote cheerfully, seemed surrounded with comforts, and mentioned nothing that she could not praise. . . . The house, furniture, neighbourhood and roads were all to her taste. . . . Elizabeth perceived that she must wait for her own visit there to know the rest."

During her visit at the Collinses, Elizabeth, in spite of her own discretion and the young wife's reserve, was not long in perceiving that her friend's best moments were those when she succeeded in forgetting that the house and garden in which she delighted were inevitably connected with something infinitely less desirable.

> " When Mr. Collins said anything of which his wife might reasonably be ashamed, which certainly was not seldom, she involuntarily turned her eye on Charlotte. . . From his garden Mr. Collins would have led them round his two meadows, but the ladies not having shoes to encounter the remains of a white frost turned back ; and while Sir William accompanied him, Charlotte took her sister and friend over the house, extremely well pleased probably to have the opportunity of showing it without her husband's help. It was rather small, but well built and convenient ; and everything was fitted up and arranged with a neatness and consistency of which Elizabeth gave Charlotte all the credit. When Mr. Collins could be forgotten there was really a great air of comfort throughout, and by Charlotte's evident enjoyment of it, Elizabeth supposed he must be often forgotten."

When Mrs. Collins spent a morning in doing needlework, she settled down in a very small room. Elizabeth was surprised at first that her friend did not prefer to sew in the dining-room, which was much larger and had a much better aspect. But her surprise was not of long duration.

> " She soon saw that her friend had an excellent reason for what she did, for Mr. Collins would undoubtedly have been much less in his own apartment had they sat in one equally lively, and she gave Charlotte credit for the arrangement."

When she left the Collinses, Elizabeth told herself that it was very sad to leave poor Charlotte in this company, which she had nevertheless chosen of her own free will.

She foresaw that the young wife's existence would be less and less happy as her house and garden and all her domestic occupations gradually lost the charm of novelty in her eyes.

By one of those supple contortions which allow English morality to adapt itself to certain contradictions, to the apparently illogical aspect of certain forms of reality, Jane Austen, in studying marriage from the feminine point of view, condemns marriages purely of convenience, but at the same time admits that it may be necessary for a girl who loves one man to give herself in marriage to another for whom she can at best feel only a certain liking.

Just as in daily life the individual is constantly obliged to efface himself or herself and bow to the demands of others, so there are subtle compromises in questions of dignity, feeling and position which a woman would do well to face before marriage.

On one hand there is a contemptible bargain—that of loveless marriage—which is bound to be a bad bargain as well ; on the other hand marriage for love which is nothing but a passing caprice of senses and imagination may be considered the purest folly.

Between these two extremes, though far below the really perfect union achieved by Emma and Mr. Knightley or Elizabeth and Darcy, Jane Austen would have us believe that there are marriages of reason which girls can and should accept. Convinced that disappointment in love never killed anyone yet, and, moreover, working too closely from reality not to know that the sheer need of loving forces a wounded heart to love again, she shows us that a second attachment is possible, and even probable, in a girl who is neither light nor sentimental.

If Edmond Bertram had married Miss Crawford, Fanny Price would some day have consented to marry Henry Crawford.

Anne Elliot, too, contemplates marriage with her cousin not unwillingly at one time though she has never ceased to love Captain Wentworth. Though circumstances may have shattered a dream which was beloved, everyone must re-enter life after a certain period of mourning.

There is no grief which cannot be healed, there are no disasters which are irreparable as long as the life forces have their normal sway.

Whatever our disillusions may have been, and because we all incline instinctively to a condition of stable equilibrium realized when we are in harmony with ourselves and life, we all set about building a new happiness upon the ruins of a happiness destroyed.

And yet, more marvellous, we know how to draw a certain sustaining comfort from the moderate happiness of the moment which can make us forget the great joys and sorrows of the past.

So that Fanny would not have been in the least fickle, only faithful to the laws of life and nature, if she had ended by marrying Henry Crawford. If he had persevered and had acted honourably, Fanny would certainly have been his reward, granted with all her heart, when a reasonable time had elapsed after Edmond's marriage. In the same way, Fanny, who had been the confidant of Edmond's love for another girl, ends by joyfully accepting the love which had at first been withheld from her, without one pang of humiliation.

> "I purposely abstain from dates on these occasions, that everyone may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions and the transfer

of changing attachments must vary much as to time in different people. I must entreat everybody to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so and not a week earlier Edmond did cease to care about Miss Crawford and became as anxious to marry Fanny as Fanny herself could desire."

The galleryful of feminine portraits by Jane Austen, which contains so many witty, dreamy or ingenuous faces, does not present a single pleasant one in the case of mothers, aunts and elderly women, who are all portrayed as unpleasant or ridiculous or even odious.

Stupid or tyrannical wives, indifferent or indiscriminating mothers, Mrs. Bennet, Mrs. Ferrars, Lady Bertram, Mrs. Norris, Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Dashwood, are all invariably presented in a most unflattering light, and their faults and failings are emphasised without mercy.

Folly and mischief-making, excusable or, at least, less offensive in an inexperienced being, and, in youth, perhaps not altogether unamiable, reveal themselves in elderly women in all their sad and ugly reality.

If they are kind, like Mrs. Bennet and Mrs. Jennings, their kindness, which is not directed either by tact or common sense, only leads them to spend their energy in attentions to others which are quite useless and often really harmful.

Mrs. Bennet, for example, has the laudable ambition of getting her daughters married advantageously, but this intention becomes a pretext for inflicting cruel humiliations upon Elizabeth and Jane at every turn.

She boasts of their talents ; she invents awkward contrivances or ridiculous manœuvres in her efforts to find husbands for them.

Nevertheless, if Jane and Elizabeth were not unlike their mother in every way, except for their good looks,

Mrs. Bennet's ambition would very likely never have been satisfied.

There are even worse failings, of which we are shown the effects in Mrs. Ferrars, in *Sense and Sensibility*, and in the verbose Mrs. Norris of *Mansfield Park* :—

> " Mrs. Ferrars was a little thin woman, upright even to formality in her figure, and serious even to sourness in her aspect. Her complexion was sallow and her features small without beauty, and naturally without expression, but a lucky contraction of the brow had rescued her countenance from the disgrace of insipidity by giving it the strong characters of pride and insipidity."

A cleverer woman and more of a hypocrite, Mrs. Norris is worthy to be coupled with Mrs. Ferrars. Mrs. Norris can never flatter her two favourite nieces enough, and is always reproaching Fanny, whom she regards as an intruder, for the charity and kindness which she receives at the hands of so many people.

The love of power and avarice—the two passions which increase with years—entirely occupy Mrs. Norris's heart and mind.

When her husband dies she comforts herself with the reflection that " she will be able to get on very well without him."

When her brother-in-law, Sir Thomas Bertram, arrives suddenly at his own house, Mansfield Park, she is angry because he did not let her know he was returning.

> " She was vexed by the *manner* of his return . . . instead of being sent for out of the room to see him first, and having to spread the happy news through the house, Sir Thomas, with a very reasonable dependence, perhaps on the nerves of his wife and children, had sought no confidant but the butler, and had been following him almost instantaneously into the drawing-room.
>
> " Mrs. Norris felt herself defrauded of an office on which

she had always depended, whether his arrival or his death were to be the thing unfolded."

This restless chatterbox of a woman can even invent ingenious methods of making herself feel generous. This is how she sent a present to her little god-daughter :—

"Fanny had indeed nothing to convey from Aunt Norris but a message to say that she hoped her god-daughter was a good girl and learned her book. There had been at one moment a slight murmur in the drawing-room at Mansfield Park about sending her a Prayer-book, but no second sound had been heard of such a purpose. Mrs. Norris, however, had gone home, and had taken down two old Prayer-books of her husband with that idea ; but upon examination the ardour of the generosity went off. One was found to have too small print for a child's eyes, and the other to be too cumbersome for her to carry about."

Miss Austen's older women are generally kind-hearted (for Mrs. Ferrars and Mrs. Norris are exceptions among them), but their very genuine maternal tenderness is solely due to instinct.

"Fanny's disappointment in her mother was greater. *There* she had hoped much and found almost nothing. . . . Not that Mrs. Price was unkind, but instead of gaining on her affection and confidence and becoming more and more dear, her daughter never met with greater kindness from her than on the first day of her arrival. The instinct of nature was soon satisfied, and Mrs. Price's attachment had no other source. Her heart and her time were already quite full ; she had neither leisure nor affection to bestow on Fanny."

Mrs. Dashwood loves her daughter Marianne most tenderly, but this injudiciously applied affection of hers has a great deal to do with the grief which the romantic girl is obliged to go through before she learns to submit to the stern laws of existence.

HIGH SCHOOL

The folly, indifference and egoistic affections of Mrs. Price, Mrs. Bennet and Lady Bertram are brought out with a frankness, which surprises us from time to time, which can only be explained by the attitude of the author to reality.

Jane Austen refuses to give us heroines dowered with every grace and every perfection, nor will she adopt the conventional attitude of most novelists towards the mother of a family.

She knows too well that human realities bear very little resemblance to the touching and flattering representations of fiction, and that a foolish, vain, injudicious woman cannot be a cherished and respected friend of her children, nor a prudent and reliable adviser.

Marriage and maternity have not supplied Mrs. Bennet with the tact and good sense which she lacked by nature.

In novels where the characters are men and women of "feeling" we are shown parents whose affection for their children remains as ardent as ever in spite of years of separation.

The first interview between Evelina and the father who abandoned her is more tender, more drenched with tears than it might have been if a father who was passionately fond of his child had been reunited with her after long and cruel anguish of separation.

Mrs. Price, on the contrary, when Fanny comes home again after ten years' absence, cannot love this daughter who is almost a stranger to her as much as she loves the children from whom she has never been separated.

In the same way, children are treated by Jane Austen in a very different light from that in which the imagination of many authors is pleased to view them, attribut-

NOTE.—"Pictures of perfection . . . make me sick and wicked." *Letters of Jane Austen*, 23 *March*, 1816.

ing to them all the angelic gentleness of disposition and obedience to parents which any parent could desire.

The children of her novels are like those in life, often noisy, capricious and quarrelsome.

Lady Middleton may boast that her little Anna-Maria is the gentlest and sweetest child in the world, but Ellinor would have had to be deaf not to conclude, on hearing the sweet child's piercing shrieks, that the noisiest child in the world could not have outdone her.

There is only one taking little figure among Jane Austen's spoilt children : the little boy who dances with Emma Watson, and says to his uncle when the girl passes them afterwards :—

> " Look at my partner, uncle. Isn't she pretty."

Wifely affection is no greater success than maternal love with a Mrs. Bennet or Lady Bertram.

All that remains of something which twenty years before was a love-match is a habit of placid fondness, or an absolute familiarity, which has become a little embittered, or is swallowed up in pure indifference.

The joyful and confident betrothed couples that we leave in the last chapters of the novels must rely on themselves for faith in the future before them, for the examples of prolonged conjugal life around them give precious little encouragement to the young and hopeful.

The disharmony of an ill-assorted couple furnish material for plenty of humorous scenes in *Pride and Prejudice*, and brings forth the ironical remark :—

> " Had Elizabeth's opinion been all drawn from her own family, she could not have formed a very pleasing picture of conjugal felicity or domestic comfort."

At the same time, these scenes do not give a sense of disenchantment, either to her or to the reader.

Elizabeth is wise enough to understand that, if Mr. and Mrs. Bennet are not perfectly happy together, it is their own fault and not the fault of marriage.

We are shown the happiness which is possible in marriage in *Persuasion*.

It is true that such happiness is rather rare, but it can always be attained by a woman who is good-hearted enough and perceptive enough to make herself a dearer and dearer companion to her husband as the years go by.

Mrs. Croft had stuck close to her husband through all his campaigns, and had never had time to think herself ill and unhappy but during that year when she stayed at Deal while he was cruising in the North Sea.

The mutual tenderness of this elderly couple is a vision of " perfect happiness " to Anne Elliot, and it delights her to see them out walking together, and to notice that, when they meet friends and a little group forms round them, Mrs. Croft seems to be as much interested in the conversation and to take as much part in it as any one of the naval officers who have stopped to talk to them.

The women who lead useless and bored existences—unloving mothers and indifferent wives, women whose beauty has been faded by time, which has not developed their hearts and minds in compensation—are very numerous in Jane Austen's novels, because her studies are made in a lethargic section of society.

But we—like her young heroines—are well aware that the passing years need not be formidable, and are powerless to render us odious to ourselves or others, if we do but claim from them the gift of more and more intelligent sympathy in our every outlook, even as they bear us on towards inevitable decline.

Before the coming of Jane Austen, the heroine of a novel whether she was called Clarissa Harlowe, Sophia Western or Evelina, whether she was poor Maria of the *Sentimental Journey* or the virtuous Pamela Andrews, was always a somewhat conventional figure with something of a borrowed grace in her sensitiveness. Either her beauty or her adventures or her misfortunes have set her apart from others, and her perfections and sorrows have a special light shed upon them which is not daylight as we know it in the real world.

The optics of the theatre are used in this type of fiction, at any rate in everything which concerns the heroine whom we are nearly always shown in exceptional situations and rarely in everyday life or in undress.

She is hardly ever seen out of her best clothes or in the slightest disarray, unless the irreproachable dressing of her hair has been ruffled in a desperate struggle with cruel ravishers.

We are invited to contemplate her matchless beauty and to deplore her unparalleled misfortunes, but we only know one aspect of her.

If she has a kind heart, the author only brings her on to the scene with the object of showing off her kindness ; and if she is prudent and sensible, we must hear all about it until her sagacity becomes intolerable to us.

This middle-class heroine, who belongs to the same social set as her readers and lives in the same century, yet has certain resemblances to those personified abstractions, Una, Duessa or Glorianna, the creations of Spenser.

The author makes her very like a real woman ; she moves in a familiar setting, and yet she is not touched with life ; she does not breathe.

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If from time to time we do see her as a person, it is really as a personification, sometimes of virtue, sometimes of misfortune or of beauty, that she exists, rather than a virtuous, beautiful or unfortunate girl who acts and feels like a living woman.

Fielding, who paints Sophia Western in the colours of life, first presents her to us in a cloud of incense and eulogy.

We must acknowledge her as a goddess before we know her as the most charming girl who ever fell in love with a " bad lot."

On every page Pamela *is* the Virtue Rewarded of Richardson's title, and the laudable anxiety that she constantly betrays that her virtue may be adequately rewarded, surpasses anything that the most calculating of chaste and pretty servant-girls could conceive of.

Clarissa is persecuted innocence, but in this case it is true, Richardson's title does not insist upon it.

This insistence on one aspect of a character, or of a being is, by the way, often imposed upon the author by his conception of what fiction ought to be.

Richardson is first of all a moralist ; he is always aiming at the edification and instruction of his reading public ; and in his desire that his lessons may be driven home he has, unfortunately, absolutely no fear of repeating himself.

His intentions cannot be too much in evidence since they are inspired by the desire to see virtue triumphant.

These didactic and moralising tendencies of Richardson are found again in Miss Burney's fiction.

Only a different moral is preached.

That is where Clarissa and Evelina no longer resemble each other.

Miss Burney's heroine is not " virtue " or " beauty " personified, she is " decorum," since the ideals of

society have developed rapidly between 1740 and 1770.

The authoress's chief care is to show off Evelina's "delicacy" and "distinction" and the "scruples" which make the girl as fearful of violating the laws of etiquette as of those of the strictest morality.

Evelina is represented as having always lived retired from the world, and she is supposed to be ignorant of the ways of the world; but as a matter of fact her "scruples" and her "reserve" are those of a young person who is quite destitute of the rustic ingenuousness of a village maiden.

She is really a "society girl" of the period, and is destined to serve as a model to her young compeers in real life, who are expected to try and vie with the "sensibility," "shyness" and "delicacy" of the incomparable Evelina.

Jane Austen's heroines—and it is this which distinguishes them from Clarissas and Evelinas, like Catherine of *Northanger Abbey*, have "nothing of a heroine of romance about them."

It is simply the accident of filling the central position of a love-story which makes heroines of them; but they show no hint of those perfections and those astounding misfortunes which raise a girl above the level of ordinary mortals.

Possessing neither superhuman virtue nor unmatched beauty, they appear to us in all the simplicity and variety of their own characters.

They never strike an attitude or adopt a pose. They need be nothing but themselves all day long; nice girls, rather badly educated, sad when circumstances force it on them, and cheerful because they are young and in good health, provided that cheerfulness is not uncalled for at the moment.

For the first time English fiction gives us heroines who never fly up above the level of reality, who are neither angels nor goddesses, and, born to a placid middle-class existence, contrive to be happy in it.

They are subjected to all the contingencies which up to that time the heroine of a novel had been spared.

Returning from a long country walk in driving rain, they arrive with—

> " Weary ankles, dirty stockings and a face glowing with exercise."

Their lives, like their days, are tranquil and all of a piece. They spend their time in embroidery and fringe-making ; they play a few pieces rather badly on the piano ; they draw or paint, and, most important of all, they receive visits from their friends and very often go to call on them.

Their persons are less well known to us than is the way they spend their time.

The features of these heroines, whose living image we can so well conjure up, are not once described by the author.

The only finished portrait which occurs in the whole series of novels is found in " Emma," and we are given it in a conversation between two friends of the girl :—

> " Such an eye ! the true hazel eye—and so brilliant ! regular features, open countenance, with a complexion—oh what a bloom of full health, and such a pretty height and size ; such a firm and upright figure. There is health not merely in her bloom, but in her air, her head, her glance. One hears sometimes of a child being the ' picture of health ' ; now Emma always gives me the idea of being the complete picture of grown-up health. She is loveliness itself, is she not, Mr. Knightley ? "

If the characteristics of their persons deserve no higher praise than to be called the " picture of health,"

how are Jane Austen's heroines ever to be a pattern to us, how are they to personify some moral aim ?

For health and happiness are not easily to be obtained by exhortation.

An author can only hold them up to the admiration, and perhaps the envy, of a reader.

Since they do not answer to the requirements demanded of a heroine of the eighteenth century, nor ever personify the " heroic virtues," without one of which a young person was not worthy or competent to interest readers through four, five or six volumes, they were not viewed with any particular favour by the public when the books first appeared. Not that Elizabeth Bennet, Emma or Anne Elliot have ever lacked admirers.

They *were* appreciated, but only by the few, while the majority of novel-readers preferred some such nonentity as Rosanne or Matilda. At a time when a sentimental doll like the heroine of *Self-Control*, by Mary Brunton, like Clarentine, or Ida of Athens, were admired for the " elegance " of their manners and the " delicacy " of their sentiments, the heroines of Jane Austen very likely appeared too natural to please.

This very naturalness, their perfect ease, their gaiety, their candour, simply shocked readers accustomed to tame and artificial graces, as if they had been really bad qualities.

A letter written by Miss Mitford in 1814 expresses an opinion which was shared at this period by many men and women who had read *Sense and Sensibility* or *Pride and Prejudice* :—

> " The want of elegance is almost the only want in Miss Austen. I have not read her *Mansfield Park*, but it is impossible not to feel in every line of *Pride and Prejudice* and in every word of Elizabeth the entire want of taste

which could produce so pert, so worldly a heroine as the beloved of such a man as Darcy. . . . I quite agree with you in preferring Miss Austen to Miss Edgeworth. If the former had a little more taste, a little more perception of the graceful as well as of the humorous, I know not indeed anyone to whom I should not prefer her. There is none of the hardness, the cold selfishness of Miss Edgeworth about her writings; she is in a much better humour with the world; she preaches no sermons; she wants nothing but the beau-ideal of the female character to be a perfect novel-writer; and perhaps even the beau-ideal would be missed by such a *petite-maîtresse* in books as myself who would never admit a muse into my library, until she had been taught to dance by the graces."

The opinion of a *petite-maîtresse*, as Miss Mitford calls herself, was also that of Madame de Staël in a slightly different and even more unflattering form.

Sir J. Mackintosh had once recommended Madame de Staël to read a novel by Miss Austen. But perhaps (according to Sir J. Mackintosh), "because it is impossible for a foreigner to appreciate Miss Austen properly," after reading one of the novels, the author of *Corinne* and *Delphine*, who had found it neither agreeable nor interesting, pronounced it "commonplace."

A romance without passion or adventure, of which the heroines are neither intellectuals nor great lovers, must certainly have seemed to Madame de Staël an uninteresting reproduction of that flat and commonplace everyday life from which her own imagination helped her to escape into elation, boundless enthusiasm and dramatic happenings.

Yet, to-day, Laura and Margiana are forgotten, the noble Corinne herself is neglected, and the very points in Elizabeth which made her seem "commonplace" in 1814 have given her the power to live on and make her true to life to us of to-day. The heroines of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Persuasion* are as

young to-day as when Jane Austen first traced the outline of their gracious forms. Not even the whims of fashion have been able to "knock them out."

We need the help of an illustrator like Hugh Thomson before we even consider that theirs was the youth of Prince Regent's day, when women wore muslin scarves and dressed their hair *à la* Mameluke.

Just as she never gives a description of the heroine's appearance, Jane Austen never describes dress. But though the absence of detail as to their toilets allows us to forget the date of her heroines, it does not explain why they have never grown old.

Compared to Sophia Western, Clarissa or Evelina, Elizabeth Bennet and Fanny Price are strangely modern girls.

Every word and thought of Richardson's, Fielding's and Miss Burney's heroines is stamped with the mark of the eighteenth century, and unfolds ideas, feelings and tastes which we no longer share.

In Jane Austen's case hardly anything dates itself.

One might still—with trifling differences—find girls like Jane Austen's in some English vicarage or country house.

Clarissa, Sophia and Evelina are types and possess a synthetic value rather than an individual one.

The moral, sentimental and social ideals of eighteenth-century England are expressed in them.

They belong to the century of rationality, which was at the same time the golden age of sentimentality; they had the common sense which calculates, and that practical virtue which swings inevitably towards immediate and material advantage; delicacy was theirs also, and easy tears, shyness and touching dependency. To those gifts which are theirs by nature are added the qualities or charms which the taste of the day

demanded above all others, to such an extent that their innate and permanent characteristics are subordinated to those which were acquired and artificial.

That is why these amiable and touching young women seem to us nowadays mere bundles of disused graces and virtues which are hopelessly behind the times, while the heroines of Jane Austen breathe a psychological atmosphere very little different from our own.

For in drawing her heroines Jane Austen was able to look at life and reality unhampered by passing conventions of fashion and taste.

Instead of adapting them to a preconceived ideal, an artificial conception of woman, she desired to attain to the eternal verities in things human.

For the first time, a young girl appeared in a novel exactly what she was in real life. She is in no way idealised, nothing in her character or actions is a sacrifice to truth or is commanded by a desire to embellish or modify reality.

As if this were not sufficient innovation, Jane Austen succeeded in giving her heroines a charm which no one had been able to produce in a heroine before without putting her into exceptional conditions, and therefore outside the common lot of humanity.

And that is perhaps the rarest merit of the heroines which she created—we like to think—somewhat after her own image ; they pleased, they won hearts, not by intelligence or great beauty, but because of their simplicity and gaiety and grace.

CHAPTER II

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF JANE AUSTEN

AT a first reading it seems fairly obvious that one may classify a book like *Mansfield Park* or *Pride and Prejudice* as a comedy of manners.

At first the plot, and the bringing to life of a little world which is gracefully behind the times, seem to be the main attraction.

But Jane Austen's books possess charm rather like one of Goldsmith's heroines.

Sophia's beauty was not striking, but for serious conquests it had a better quality than that. Her looks were sweet, modest and attractive.

And one does not perceive any striking beauty in reading through Miss Austen's books for the first time. There is just the pleasure of spending a few agreeable hours in the good company of happy people.

Then, if we read them again—and we always do read them again—we see that the comedy of manners is at the same time a study of character.

Beneath the amusing and almost frivolous exteriors, above and beyond the surface value of the admirably-woven plot and the vivid portraiture of society of a past century, we discover in these pages the deeper and more binding interest, always attached to a study of psychology when, like this one, it is delicate, subtle and finely shaded.

Action, speech and pose, which at first seemed to have been designed by the artist expressly for the pleasure of reproducing life and reality, have, as a matter of fact, been noted with scrupulous care, less for their own sake than for the sake of what they signify.

This is not only an artist's work, it is a psychologist's as well.

Any peculiarity which may strike one in the form of the novels is due quite as much to the psychological as to the artistic conception of Jane Austen.

We shall see later why the artist attaches so little importance to staging in her novels ; we shall understand that it is almost always neglected from the psychologist's point of view—neglected when it will add nothing to the unfolding of a soul, when the artist cannot avail herself of it to help her indicate some line or feature of a moral physiognomy.

Because she is more interested in the characters of her personages than in their actions—or rather, because she regards the latter as the outward and visible sign of the former—she entirely disregards the setting unless it is in close relation with some inner landscape where she is observing the passing gleams and shadows of thought and emotion.

Thus, in *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, picturesque and alive with local colour and movement as the streets of Bath must certainly have been, she does not think it worth while to call attention to them by description.

What diverting sights Anne Elliot might have seen in the course of her morning walks through a town overflowing with the idle, fashionable mob !

But it suits the author that she shall pass along in complete isolation from the outer world. The gentle girl moves on her way quite insensible to the spectacle

that the squares, the streets and the pedestrians might provide her with ; she is wrapt in her secret dream ; her eyes are fixed on the vision of happiness which life has so long withheld.

> " Prettier musings of high-wrought love and eternal constancy could never have passed along the streets of Bath than Anne was sporting with from Campden Place to West Buildings. It was almost enough to spread purification and perfume all the way."

Allusions to the setting in her novels resolve themselves into a few indications of landscape, of which one alone, in *Persuasion,* merits the term of description, and a word or two as to the situation of a country house or the beauty of a park, in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility.*

Time and season are only noted definitely when they have connection with some psychological observation.

> " Emma's spirits were mounted quite up to happiness ; everything wore a different air. . . .When she looked at the hedges she thought the elder at least must soon be coming out ; and when she turned round to Harriet she saw something like a look of spring, a tender smile even there."

Another fleeting moment of communion between nature and the human soul is noted here :—

> " Her *pleasure* in the walk must arise from the exercise and the day, from the view of the last smiles of the year, upon the tawny leaves and withered hedges, and from repeating to herself some few of the thousand poetical descriptions extant of autumn, that season which has drawn from every poet worthy of being read, some attempt at description, or some lines of feeling . . . the sweet scenes of autumn were for a while put by, unless some tender sonnet fraught with the apt analogy of the declining year, with declining happiness and the images of youth and hope and spring all gone together, blessed her memory."

It is the inner life which holds the author's attention.

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She who declared once that she was more interested in persons than in things suppresses all reference to her own feminine tastes.

Her letters betray a very feminine passion for dress ; one dress is so carefully described that we should be able to copy it to the least detail. In her work, on the other hand, the dress of her heroines is left to our imagination.

Though every page is permeated with a perfume of youth and feminine charm, though we are never left in doubt for a moment as to the colour of a thought or mood of Elizabeth or Emma, even in their subtlest shades, we know nothing of the sweep and fall of their draperies, nor the colour of their gowns.

A wide experience would seem to be the necessary condition for a study of psychology if it is not to be merely a confession or more or less faithful autobiography.

The novelist who has a narrow experience of life and men seems to be in danger of producing false or incomplete work.

How can he plumb the depths of reality or give his characters a really human soul which we can recognise if he only observes certain aspects of life and never suspects its infinite variety ?

If for want of wide enough experience he is at a loss for points of comparison, does he not run the risk of over-emphasizing certain peculiarities at the expense of essential characteristics.

From this point of view the psychological treatment of the work of Jane Austen, a woman whose experience did not go beyond the family circle, is to some extent an enigma.

A picture of contemporary manners, study of a definite class of society, the life and customs of the "gentry," it is true that this fiction presents us with people and things all the better known to the author because they were the only people and things that she did know. And yet does not the exactitude, the fine, penetrating vision of inner reality, of the psychology on which this fiction is based owe its being, not to the patient effort of an observant mind but to a kind of intuition?

First of all, if there were no intuition in the case, or none of that divination of experience, nor of the sense of the worth of experience, all of which belong to genius, how could Jane Austen have known that the Bennets, the Norrises, the Bertrams, and the Elliots had beneath their folly and insignificance the power of rousing the attention, provoking amusement and sometimes of winning the hearts of readers?

Again, how, without intuition, after having created out of her narrow experience beings so true to life, could she have fathomed the secret of many different souls or have penetrated to the hidden sources of character and personality?

The origins of this intuitive knowledge, this divination of the psychological reality escapes us, defies our analysis; but we may, at any rate, follow the course of them and study them in stages of development.

It is the immediate truth which is sought in her psychological study quite as much as in her observation of externals. She bases her research on the individual, the particular.

The sum of psychological truth contained in a portrait such as that of Elizabeth or Emma is made up of multitudinous details noted rapidly and with lucid ease. Because her mind is not powerful enough to connect

each peculiarity noted with some great law or principle ; because, also, her good sense and good taste make her averse from vague generalisations, Jane Austen gives us " instantaneous " studies of psychology in her fiction, and leaves it to us to draw wider conclusions from them.

To draw conclusions from this or that fact, to reduce the infinite variety of individual experience to a common measure, seems to her both tiresome and useless.

To one who finds in the spectacle of life an inexhaustible field for observation, to turn from this spectacle and moralise on life and human nature is an occupation for pedants and fools.

Sententious reflections and abstractions she puts into the mouth of Mary Bennet or Mrs. Elton :—

> " ' Pride,' observed Mary, who piqued herself upon the solidity of her reflections, ' is a very common failing, I believe. By all that I have read I am convinced that it is very common indeed ; that human nature is particularly prone to it, and that there are very few of us who do not cherish a feeling of self-complacency on the score of some quality or other, real or imaginary. Vanity and pride are different things, though the words are often used synonymously. A person may be proud without being vain. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves ; vanity to what we would have others think of us.' "

It is because such dicta, in applying to everybody, end by applying to nobody in particular, that Jane Austen considers them false and ridiculous. Her psychological study, which is always in close relation to an individual case, is exercised upon a precisely-defined object, and never flies above the domain of concrete reality.

But by its very exactitude, and thanks to the marvellous intuition which guides it straight to the significant and the characteristic in that domain,

this psychology which always swings round to the individual attains to the universal.

When Emma is studying the character of Jane Fairfax, she does not trouble herself to draw general conclusions from it ; she observes Miss Fairfax, in whom she is obscurely aware of having a rival, and tries to calculate the effect that the girl's reserve would produce on a man like Mr. Knightley.

What could be more concrete, more limited, than such an attitude ; and yet what truth in the answer to a remark that Miss Fairfax is too reserved to attract love, that no one would love a girl so cold and self-possessed.

> " ' Not before,' said Emma, ' her coldness and reserve melt to one person only, and then the love of that person would be all the more irresistibly drawn to her.' "

Emma, whose opinions and previsions are often contradicted by reality when they have arbitrary and capricious foundations, is not mistaken in this instance. A sudden blaze of intuition reveals to her all that her conclusion about Miss Fairfax signifies ; and, though she does not know it, her answer has given form to a great truth.

This power of divination, which is Emma's only for a moment, gives the whole of Jane Austen's psychological study an incomparable savour and fascination ; it illumines every aspect of inner reality with a light so clear and brilliant that explanation and comment become superfluous.

As with the social atmosphere, so the psychological atmosphere of Jane Austen has nothing exceptional in its composition, nothing rare or strange.

The misapprehensions and misunderstandings of mind and heart which she studies might occur with almost any of us.

The characters who deal in them and repent of them have the ordinary everyday good and bad qualities, and show no signs of the "diabolical perversity" or of the "nature of an angel" with which the rudimentary psychology of Mrs. Radcliffe invariably endows her heroes and heroines.

In *Emma* or *Persuasion* the observation is so true to life, the presentation of inner reality is so subtle and exact, that every one of the characters, far from belonging to fiction, appear to us as beings whose mind and soul are really well known to us.

In this society of educated people which Jane Austen describes, amongst these people all of the same world, who from childhood up have been submitted to much the same sorts of discipline, bowing to the same social conventions, sharing the same opinions and the same prejudices, there can only be a difference of degree between one person or another.

We are in the presence of "well-born people," moulded to suppress every sign of emotion as if the betrayal of it were a sign of bad taste, a loss of dignity.

Remarkable acuteness and exactitude of vision are therefore necessary to catch the expression which betrays and reveals the significant word or attitude.

With the Woodhouses and at Mansfield Park sensibility is always restrained because it is thought to approach too closely to sentimentality, and, consequently, the author makes mind play a larger part than feeling in the characters she is studying.

An Elizabeth, Emma or Ellinor stand out among other girls all much of the same standing where sensibility is concerned, distinguished from them by the possession of a higher degree of penetration or vivacity of mind.

It is intelligence, and intelligence alone, which

renders Mr. Knightley superior to Mr. Woodhouse, and by one of those issues which are the secret of genius this psychological study which holds sensibility so tightly in check, acquires all the more lucidity and certainty from this very fact.

Applying the same processes to her dealings with the inner life that she has used in portraying the small circle on which her attention is fixed, Jane Austen reproduces a character all the more faithfully for having first simplified it and reduced it to the elements which seem to her the essential ones.

But this simplification does not exclude the study of the innumerable forms that one characteristic may assume in the same person.

Also, in each of the scenes that succeed each other, the characters—whatever the part they play—seem to us, to quote Macaulay, to be :—

> " A multitude of characters, all in a certain sense commonplace, all such as we meet every day. Yet they are all as perfectly discriminated from each other as if they were the most eccentric of human beings."

Are we expected to gather that Jane Austen had a tacit contempt for all the cataclysms of emotion, all the blind impulses and abandonments of passion, from the fact that she makes all her characters calm and deliberate ?

Dared she not explore any fearful and unknown region ?

Or was it that never having experienced any love herself that was not remarkably like friendship and nothing else, she believed that a burning and tormenting passion was either a romantic invention of poets, or else a madness, from which people of good sense and good taste took care to preserve themselves ?

Charlotte Brontë's vehement diatribe on the subject of Jane Austen's "insensibility" indicates in a manner that is as just as it is picturesque the scope and reach of the psychological study in *Pride and Prejudice* and the other novels.

> "She does her business of delineating the surface of the lives of genteel English people curiously well. . . . There is a Chinese fidelity, a miniature delicacy in the painting. . . . The passions are perfectly unknown to her; she rejects even speaking acquaintance with that stormy sisterhood . . . her business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands and feet. What sees keenly, speaks aptly, moves flexibly, it suits her to study; but what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what blood rushes through, what is the unseen seat of life and the sentient target of death . . . that Miss Austen ignores . . . Jane Austen was a complete and sensible lady, but a very incomplete and rather insensible woman."

Coincident with the great movements and sudden irresistible impulses there are in the human soul for those who examine it patiently and closely enough, perpetual onflowings and evolutions of feelings which, born in the depths of the being and buried in the dim regions of the unconscious, by tardy and almost imperceptible germination succeed in pushing their way to the level of the consciousness.

This slow process, this passage from the unconscious to the conscious, has been chosen by Jane Austen as the psychological theme of all her novels with the single exception of *Northanger Abbey*.

This had the value of originality at the time when Jane Austen wrote.

Richardson's psychological work was analysis and not the study of the development of a character.

In Jane Austen's work the inner life is more truly presented because it is more supple and more moving.

With subtlety and an admirably sure touch the author follows the constant, but almost unconscious, forward movement of self-knowledge.

This progression is noted with a delicacy such that we cannot measure the different stages or arrive before the heroine at the moment when mind and judgment, *illumine*, explain and justify feeling.

Thus we are shown what may be called a crisis of the soul, but with no painful conflict, no hour of tragedy, painted in the subtlest shades, and unfolding a continuous series of moments, insignificant in themselves, but each one contributing something to the final revelation in which the study comes to an end.

This series of psychological facts is accompanied by a corresponding series of incidents, developed on parallel lines, and evolving on the same curve.

Every incident and every fresh detail adds something to the action, just as every shade of feeling and opinion is necessary for the final unravelling to which the story is steadily moving on.

In order that we may follow the inner progression as easily as that of the incidents, the author sometimes breaks the impersonal narration and yields up her own thought to us in a letter or perhaps a reverie.

There we discover the secret mechanism of actions which we are to witness, or the explanation of an act for which nothing in outward events has supplied a motive.

Those of the novels whose psychological value is equal to their dramatic value, derive great and very real variety from the character-study, even more than from the differences in plot.

And yet at first sight no themes appear to lend themselves less well to variety than those chosen by the author.

A young girl considers herself in love with one man and then finds that without suspecting it she has loved another all the time.

That is the *motif* of *Pride and Prejudice* and also of *Emma*.

To be faithful to one's love in spite of any trial; the tedious torment of waiting or practical certainty of no longer being loved—that is the subject of *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Persuasion*.

A secret affinity forms a bond between some of the heroines.

Elizabeth and Emma resemble each other in more ways than one; the same fidelity, the same serene gentleness, draw Ellinor, Fanny and Anne together.

But the psychology founded on the individual character of each one differs in its processes and its scope.

The subtle analysis, touched in with so sure a hand in *Pride and Prejudice*, is not woven all through the tissue of the book.

From the time that Darcy is able to justify his conduct towards Jane and Bingley, Elizabeth's rancour changes to love, and the reader can see what is going on in the girl's heart before it is supposed that she knows it herself. A long monologue, which fills nearly a whole chapter, allows us to follow the transformation which is being accomplished in Elizabeth's soul.

From that point onward only the incidents which lead to the *dénouement* or climax have any power to give an element of the unexpected to the story, and the heroine, whose psychological development has been brought to a close, no longer interests us as she did at first.

This sudden check in the psychological interest just as the story is coming to its most dramatic point makes

Pride and Prejudice (the masterpiece of her youth) inferior to *Emma*, where the creative power and intuition of the author reach the fulness of their development, and are finally consolidated.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Persuasion* the moral evolution which the author is studying does not consist of the passage of one feeling to another as in *Pride and Prejudice*.

In the souls of the former heroines we are studying different forms of the same sentiment, their growth and subtle transformations.

At the first glance this seems to be an approach to the "static" psychology employed by Richardson in *Clarissa Harlowe*, but where he only found material for heavy and monotonous analyses, the penetrating intuition of Jane Austen gives her possession of the rhythm of the inner life itself.

This noting of the shades and fluctuations of the same emotion gives a mysterious charm to the development of the plots.

The sudden transitions from joy and tenderness to love's sufferings, from discouragement to hope, accompany the different incidents of the plot, just as the murmur of a hidden stream adds loveliness to a landscape.

Between *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*, in her most brilliant novel *Emma*, Jane Austen returns to the theme of *Pride and Prejudice*, the transformation of a sentiment.

But the psychology has acquired a fulness and solidity which were lacking in 1796.

The evolution of the heroine's inner life is no longer independent of the development of the plot. No longer limited to an accompaniment of this development, the

soul's evolution enters intimately from time to time and is mixed with it inextricably.

Emma's thoughts and the outward events of her life follow the same path of progression all through the book.

Far from becoming possessed of the secret which the heroine has not discovered in her own soul, we do not know it until a sudden revelation shows Emma that she loves Mr. Knightley, and—though we could never have suspected it—that she has loved him all the time.

How is this revelation, which forms the climax in *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*, brought about ?

And why are the other heroines so fully aware of their love ?

The dominating characteristics of Miss Austen's young girls is a tenacious striving to the light, the desire to know themselves, and to understand clearly what at first they only feel obscurely.

This desire to understand and to read their own souls, which we find in heroines like Elizabeth Bennet, Ellinor Dashwood, Emma, Fanny Price, and Anne Elliot, is allied in them all with perfect simplicity and extreme modesty and reserve.

When they have admitted to themselves that they are in love, and have secretly chosen the life-companion, they dare not hope to be loved in return, and remain incapable (because they have only the vision of the very young and inexperienced) of reading the heart of the other.

To know oneself is a long and difficult task ; prejudices, vanity, the love of dominating, are so many obstacles to its accomplishment.

But a sound type of intelligence cannot blind itself with complaisance ; for such a mind the truth must be sought, and the truth must be grasped.

Though it may hesitate to accept as truth something half-known for some time, it ends in submission to this power.

Then, thanks to this submission, the mind tastes of inner tranquillity, and knows the sensation of completed joys and a life of harmony.

Without this instinctive aspiration towards truth, the life-forces and the rush of events get the upper hand, and to oppose them becomes impossible.

Sooner or later, truth will deny the affirmations of ignorance and error, and will refuse to accept the forms that are imposed upon it. Elizabeth Bennet's prejudices cannot continue to exist in the face of Darcy's kindness, and Emma's plans and determinations crumble to dust because they are founded on vanity and caprice.

The struggle which reason and common sense, champions of truth, engage in with the lures of vanity and self-sufficiency, makes up the little psychological drama which Jane Austen has associated with the adventures of her Emma.

If she had followed a custom dear to her contemporary novelists and had supplied a sub-title to her books, she would, no doubt, have added " A Comedy of Errors " to the title *Emma*.

For, transposed from the outer world to the region of psychological consciousness, it is certainly one of the most diverting and best-sustained comedies of error that ever was written.

Emma Woodhouse is a clever girl, with a sort of natural authority in her being. The caprice of a spoilt child rather than the whim of a pretty woman (she is glad that she is pretty, but is no coquette) leads her to try and settle the destiny and govern the inclinations of everybody about her.

Within her own mind she decrees that the young clergyman, Mr. Elton, shall marry Harriet Smith, and that both will owe to her the happiness of their lives.

Exercising the same sort of wisdom she makes up her mind that Frank Churchill shall fall in love with her and that she will have the double delight of listening to the avowal of his love and of rejecting his suit.

Vanity has silenced not only reason but also common sense in her.

She has to experience some cruel setbacks before she perceives that she has used her excellent abilities in the service of a series of stupidities.

Up to that point she had received with a pitying smile the warnings of her brother-in-law, who had easily guessed the real trend of Mr. Elton's amiabilities.

> " ' There is such perfect good temper and good will in Mr. Elton,' said Emma, ' as one cannot but value.'
>
> " ' Yes,' said Mr. John Knightley presently, with some shyness, ' he seems to have a great deal of good will towards *you*.'
>
> " ' Me ! ' she replied, with a smile of astonishment, ' are you imagining me to be Mr. Elton's object ? '
>
> " ' Such an imagination has crossed me, I own, Emma ; and if it never occurred to you before you may as well take it into consideration now.'
>
> " ' Mr. Elton in love with me ! What an idea ! '
>
> " ' I do not say it is so ; but you will do well to consider whether it is so or not. I think your manners to him encouraging. I speak as a friend, Emma. You had better look about you and ascertain what you do and what you mean to do.'
>
> " ' I thank you, but I assure you, you are quite mistaken, Mr. Elton and I are very good friends, and nothing more,' and she walked on, amusing herself in the consideration of the blunders which must so often arise from a partial knowledge of circumstances ; of the mistakes which people of high pretensions to judgment are for ever falling into and not very pleased with her brother for imagining her blind and in want of counsel.' "

When she is obliged to yield to evidence, and to recognise her mistake in persuading herself that Mr. Elton was in love with Harriet, Emma admits that she has been imprudent and obstinately blind.

"How could she have been so deceived! He protested that he had never thought of Harriet, never! She looked back as well as she could, but it was all confusion. She had taken up the idea she supposed, and made everything bend to it. . . . The first error and the worst lay at her door. It was foolish, it was wrong to take an active part in bringing any two people together. It was adventuring too far. . . . She was quite concerned and ashamed, and resolved to do such things no more. 'Here have I,' said she, 'actually talked poor Harriet into being very much attached to this man. She might never have thought of him but for me. Oh! that I had been satisfied with persuading her not to accept young Martin. There I was quite right! That was well done of me, but there I should have stopped and left the rest to time and chance. . . . I have been but half a friend to her, and if she were *not* to feel this disappointment so very much I am sure I have not an idea of anybody else who would be at all desirable for her—William Coxe—oh, no! I could not endure William Coxe—a pert young lawyer.'

"She stopped to blush and laugh at her own relapse, and then resumed a more serious, more dispiriting cogitation upon what had been, might be and must be."

Emma's first check is not a complete enough lesson for her. The young girl soon forgets this break-up of her schemes and wants to embark once more on directing the actions and the lives of other people. While she thinks that she is toughening the fibre of romantic Harriet's heart by her advice and her example, she is not sufficiently observant of what is going on in her own heart. She has come to the conclusion that she has decided not to marry herself, and (strangely enough) that Mr. Knightley is also to remain unmarried, in order to leave the Abbey to his nephew.

But one day, without mentioning any names, Harriet announces that she is in love and believes that her love is returned.

Emma understands that Harriet is speaking of Mr. Knightley, and a light breaks in upon her mind.

> "Emma's eyes were instantly withdrawn and she sat silently meditating in a fixed attitude for a few minutes. A few minutes were sufficient for making her acquainted with her own heart. A mind like hers once opening to suspicion made rapid progress; she touched, she admitted—she acknowledged the whole truth. Why was it so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr. Knightley than Frank Churchill? . . . Why was the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet's having some hope of return. It darted through her with the speed of an arrow that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself! . . . She saw it all with a clearness which had never blessed her before. . . . What blindness had led her on! It struck her with dreadful force, and she was ready to give it every bad name in the world. . . . The rest of the day, the following night, were hardly enough for her thoughts. She was bewildered amidst the confusion of all that had rushed on her within the last few hours. Every moment had brought fresh surprise; and every surprise must be a matter of humiliation to her. How to understand it all! How to understand the deceptions she had thus been practising on herself and living under. The blunders, the blindness of her own head and heart! . . . To understand, thoroughly understand her own heart, was the first endeavour. . . . She looked back. . . . She saw that there had never been a time when she did not consider Mr. Knightley as infinitely superior to Frank Churchill, or when his regard for her had not been infinitely more dear. She saw that in persuading herself in fancying, in acting to the contrary, she had been entirely under a delusion, totally ignorant of her own heart . . . she was proved to have been universally mistaken, and she had not quite done nothing—for she had done mischief, she had brought evil on Harriet, on herself, and she much feared on Mr. Knightley."

This comedy of errors which we see developed in

Emma had already been rapidly sketched out in *Pride and Prejudice.*

Elizabeth does not think it necessary to know Darcy before she judges him.

Cocksure and with every confidence in her own quickness, she makes up her mind about the young man at their first meeting.

And, since to relinquish her opinion would be to admit herself mistaken, she mentally accuses Darcy of all the shortcomings of which he might be, but is not, guilty.

When evidence forces her to admit that she is mistaken because her vanity would not allow her to revise a too hasty judgment, her regrets and self-reproaches are given us in the form of a meditation which is a forecast of the same mental situation in Emma Woodhouse.

It is by this fine shading, imperceptible to a less penetrating vision, that we are shown the development of character, and in this way, too, each personage in the novels assumes his or her proper moral physiognomy.

But notation as delicate as this, presented in the form of narrative or description, would lose practically all its value.

A psychological "portrait" has the bad fault of fixing the lines immovably, and the lines are too stiff and hard.

The incessant flux of life, the inexhaustible novelty and diversity of the reactions by which a being responds to the action of circumstances cannot be rendered in psychological description. Jane Austen leaves her heroes and heroines to reveal themselves to us, for how often she had been exasperated herself in reading novels where, as she said, the characters

appeared solely in order that the author might have the pleasure of describing them.

In the case of Emma, Fanny or Elizabeth we are made fully aware not only of the nature of their characters but of their secret processes of thought. In their reveries we hear them think and reflect aloud.

Even if they are not protagonists in the little comedies at which the reader is spectator, each personage reveals his character by some word that he or she lets fall, some action which is deeply significant. We have only to look at them and listen to them in order to know them and be able to form an opinion on them.

What analysis of placid egoism, or of Lady Bertram's foolishness, could equal the effect produced by this remark, pronounced when it is being discussed whether Fanny shall have a share in the games and lessons of her cousins :—

> " I only hope she will not tease my poor pug ; I have only just succeeded in getting Julia to let him alone."

We are given the measure of Mr. Rushworth's intellect in the remark :—

> " In my opinion it is very disagreeable to be always rehearsing. I think we are a great deal better employed sitting comfortably here among ourselves and doing nothing."

When the plot demands the introduction of a subsidiary figure we are not given more than a phrase, or even a word, to bring the very physiognomy of the character before us. Mrs. Rushworth, who has only a " walking-on " part, is given us in three words : " Her stately simper."

One touch creates Sir William Lucas, who had been knighted on the occasion of presenting an address to the King during the period of his mayoralty of Meryton :—

> " The distinction had perhaps been felt too strongly."

Before having seen her in action we know Mrs. Norris quite well; we know from the first pages of *Mansfield Park* that

> "As far as walking, talking and contriving reached, she was thoroughly benevolent."

And the new being which is to be found in Mr. Elton after one disappointment in love and one unlooked-for conquest, is described in a few words :—

> "He came back caring nothing for Miss Woodhouse and defying Miss Smith."

This method of procedure, this showing up a dominating characteristic by a lightning flash, might be compared to the method of a caricaturist. In these psychological short cuts of Jane Austen, the likeness is attained as in caricature by the aid of one line. Precise and exact, that line is enough. Often it is more expressive than a detailed and elaborate portrait, for it draws our attention to some peculiarity which we ourselves might not have been able to detach from the whole impression made upon us by such and such a person.

As it expresses the essential, that line always has a moral significance, and brings the dominating and distinctive qualities of the character before us.

Henceforward, we always associate these suggestions of the artist or the psychologist with the personage whenever he or she appears.

Charming and successful as this procedure is, it does not lend itself to brilliant examples by quotation here.

Detached phrases would appear to have no more significance than hundreds of other phrases. Separated from their context, from everything which renders them striking and suggestive, they would give the effect of

jewels detached from a necklace, which in their proper place scintillated from all their facets, mutually borrowing and lending added brilliancy from and to each other, but apart they are simply little stones which barely strike one as being transparent.

On page after page, psychological observations may be noted, but they are too firmly woven into the tissue of the story to be separated from it, they are too much an integral part of the work of art as a whole.

But one learns something from trying to separate the psychological thread from the others in the tissue of Jane Austen's work, something which it is important to know before studying the artistic conception of life as interpreted by this author ; the psychology of the novels is not merely one of the elements which go to the making of them, it is their very substance to which art and humour have lent their shapes.

If an author confines himself to studying people and things in their concrete reality and under their individual aspects, at least he reveals to us his implicit opinion of men and life.

The absence of all generalisation, of all philosophical reflection from his work is a confession within himself of a certain attitude of mind, and this very silence has a value which is not purely negative.

Never to be in opposition to life ; always, on the contrary, to represent it as good, sweet and worthy to be lived with love and joy; to withdraw either involuntarily or on purpose from all images any possibilities they contain of inevitable sadness, separation and mourning, is this not to proclaim better than by the most subtle reasoning and forcible argument a love of life and constant desire of happiness ?

In these novels, which do not confine their psychological study to principles and formulæ, but present it in their elements of variety, individuality and personality, we are given a philosophy of life. A philosophy which though amiable in appearance is none the less dogmatic, and leaves no place for uneasiness or doubt in the author, who puts it into practice and exhibits it in her novels.

The peace, ease and well-being of outer circumstances corresponds with the inner atmosphere of moral serenity, tranquillity, and contentment.

An artist less sure of herself, a less skilful psychologist, would try to create this double atmosphere by affirming that peace and joy are laws of life.

Jane Austen affirms nothing of the kind; she contents herself with proving it.

A most graceful novelist—somewhat ignored by the new generation—Mrs. Gaskell, tells us at the beginning of *Cranford*, that Victorian *epopée* of the feminine provincial outlook, that Miss Jenkins did not worry herself to argue whether women were worth more than men, she knew it.

This is Jane Austen's attitude to life and society. Because she herself has experienced the kindness of life which has never imposed unbearable sufferings upon her, because she dares to look the contradictions, absurdities and follies which appear on the surface of things, in the face and always with a smile, she has an unshakable confidence in life, an absolute certainty that the unknown power which governs the world desires order and well-being in all things.

Her confidence in life is not due solely to the absence of any bitter trials, it is also the result of a natural leaning to that equilibrium of the spirit, unstable

perhaps, but always regained after temporary loss, which we call optimism.

Here, again, Jane Austen is in advance of her time and beyond the region of romantic disquietude, and realizes in the clear atmosphere of her narrow sphere something of the modern "will to live."

We have noticed that her psychology is never forced into a mould, neither that of a formula nor even into the reflections scattered here and there between the dialogues, and that it reveals itself in the speech and action of each character.

In the same way her philosophy of life belongs to each work as a whole, and is merged in it in the indefinable way that the timbre of a voice is merged in the whole impression that is made upon us by that voice.

In the society she is describing, Puritan morality still exists, but the flame of Puritan faith has burned itself out.

The disquietude, the anguish, which religious emotion may arouse in a soul are unknown to her and her characters.

Moral preoccupations are as unknown at Steventon as at Mansfield.

The past has no message for the "gentry," but a tradition of upright, happy, and honoured life, and because the author is working during the first few years of the nineteenth century, the idea, or illusion, of "progress" has not yet introduced the ferment of agitation and the desire for useful activity of modern life into her circle.

And yet the satisfaction in life which is expressed on every page has no tinge of fatuous contentment. It is not merely a passive satisfaction with the Bennets and the Woodhouses.

It increases in proportion to everyone's consciousness of the part he or she has to play in society.

Life has proved, and goes on proving, to the denizens of Highbury and Mansfield Park that they are made for happiness and that they have a right to existence which is exempt from any great suffering.

But the happiness which appears as a law of existence throughout her work is not to be acquired through the use of secret means ever revealed by the author.

Jane Austen contents herself with assuring us that it does exist, and that we can all discover it for ourselves if it fails to discover itself to us.

Since this is so, she seems to say, since all the life-forces tend towards this one end, why try to solve the mysteries of destiny instead of following the road which lies open before us with a heart full of confidence and serenity ?

Though it is never once formulated explicitly, the philosophy of life enclosed in the novels of Jane Austen is full of the triumphant assurance of Goethe's verses :—

" Tell me, what dost thou with Life ? I live."

CHAPTER III

HER ART

IT is to Jane Austen herself that we owe the very just estimate of her work, which we should do well to make use of for true appreciation of her art and her conception of her art. She writes to a nephew who has been attempting authorship :—

> " What should I do with your strong, manly, vigorous sketches, full of variety and glow ? How could I possibly join them on to the little bit of ivory (two inches square) on which I work with so fine a brush as produces little effect after much labour."

Her work is indeed that of a miniaturist or illuminator ; it is a patient work on a minute scale for which the artist has so restricted an area at her disposal that she is obliged to calculate the effect of every single detail, of every touch of the brush, for the smallest error would destroy the harmony and equilibrium of the whole.

As in the case of an illuminated design, rarely and delicately tinted, in order to appreciate her work fully it is necessary to examine it closely, lingering without haste and without impatience in order to revel in the exquisite contour of the lines, to savour the freshness of the unobtrusive colouring, made complex by subtle contrasts and fine shades.

If the artist's chief triumph lies in concealing the effort of creative activity so well that his work seems

absolutely spontaneous, Jane Austen must be ranked among the greatest literary artists, the greatest "artificers" of letters.

Simplicity, ease, and perfect naturalness are the first qualities to declare themselves to readers of these novels "by a lady," into which the author has implanted all her inborn grace and distinction.

The next qualities to admire are the exact symmetry always given to the story itself, the perfection with which the means employed are adapted in order to arrive at a given effect; and, finally, one discovers from more attentive examination of these limpid and nimble pages that they could not be other than they are; they are inevitable.

In this symphony of family life, with its slender joys and cares as light as thistledown, every component part belongs to the whole, and brings its quota to the effect of all; life as it is given in this work appears almost too sagely conducted, too gentle and serene, and yet an impression of truth is emanated from these charming, these very pleasant, pages.

This work of art, whose very perfection seems to be one of those rare "arrivals" in man's arduous quest of beauty, was created in circumstances which, though neither surprising nor startling, are none the less exceptional.

Rendered free from all preoccupation with material care by the circumstances of her birth, brought up to dread rather than desire the celebrity which the world can bestow on artists, Jane Austen wrote simply for the love of writing, and only depicted people and things which were familiar to her.

The formula "Art for Art's sake," which is interpreted in so many different ways, in her case does not so much signify "Art for the sake of Beauty" (although

beauty and the charm of modesty adorn every page), nor even "Art for Truth's sake," although it is work of sincere realism, but is above all Art for the sake of the pleasure Jane Austen found in bringing to light some of the fleeting aspects of life.

From earliest youth, absorbed in the spectacle of life, she had observed and reproduced it. Her curiosity is as tireless as her interest.

She looks around her and with the elements which her own circle provides she creates an image of the real.

Her pleasure is so intense in the creation of beings, in giving them life and character and in setting them in motion among the circumstances which she invents and renders inevitable, that she is not concerned with any desire to question life and its problems, to solve enigmas, nor even to frame a judgment upon life.

A witness, not a judge of life, only one problem occupies her attention, and of this she gives a novel and distinguished solution in each of her books; her problem is that of fixing the fading mirage of appearances, the diverse shades of character and physiognomy in the simple, durable form of a story worked out with meticulous fidelity.

Between the appearance of her first books and those which she wrote at Chawton, neither her vision of reality nor her artistic conception underwent any alteration which could be called evolution.

Only one thing is to be noted: the author of *Pride and Prejudice* wrote that little masterpiece no more aware that she had made something admirable than is the worker-bee when she brings to completion the gold-coloured walls of one of the geometrical cells of the hive.

A little later, on the contrary, when the passing years,

without transforming her talent, had given the author more consciousness of the value of her work, Jane Austen is able to examine and define her methods of procedure in composition.

She even formulated them one day in a sort of every-day "Guide to the Art of Poetry" for the benefit of a young niece who is writing a novel and asks her advice :—

> "Your aunt C. does not like desultory novels, and is rather fearful yours will be too much so ; that there will be a frequent change from one set of people to another and that circumstances will sometimes be introduced of apparent consequence which lead to nothing. It will not be so great an objection to me. I allow much more latitude than she does, and think nature and spirit cover many sins of a wandering story. And people in general do not care much about it for your comfort."

With a quite charming delicacy, and as though she feared to wound the feelings of her niece in giving her advice borrowed from her own experience or personal tastes, Jane Austen gently takes her niece to task in the name of her Aunt Cassandra for several faults in the manuscript which offend her own artistic judgment, such as giving details which are useless to the development of the story and bringing in people and things unknown to the reader.

She adds in another letter :—

> "You have succeeded in grouping your characters admirably, and you have placed them in one of those settings which I like of all others. Three or four families living in a village in the heart of the country ; there's a subject for you. I hope you will persevere and will make good use of your material . . . do not lay too much stress on Mrs. Forrester's ambition and stinginess.
>
> "You have done well in showing that it is Devereux Forrester's vanity which ruins him, but I beg of you not to let him be 'sucked into a vortex of pleasure.'

> "There is nothing in the thing itself to shock me, but such an expression I cannot bear. It is the stock-in-trade of the worst novelists, and so old that Adam would have found it, I have no doubt, in the very first novel he opened."

Simple material—three or four families in a village are enough to make a novel of—patient and exact observation of everything which lies under the author's eyes in daily life ; not to enter upon life in Ireland, for instance, "if one knows nothing of the customs of the country" ; presentation of events and persons in clear, simple language, in a style so strictly distinguished that it does not admit of the introduction of ornament in doubtful taste or of jaded attractiveness ; this sums up all the advice that Jane Austen is able to give to authors.

Heaven-sent talent and the author's energy and spirit must do the rest.

But the most important point of all lies in the ability to observe and discover even in limited and uninspiring surroundings the infinite variety of tone, of colour, of light and shade which exist in all life and character for those who have eyes to see them.

When an artist has naturally a wide field of observation before him his work can be, and ought to be, on a large, bold scale.

When, on the contrary, as this artist is a woman, whose circumstances do not bring her into contact with a great variety of individuals, and do not allow her to examine different sections of society from near at hand ; in a word, when "a sheet of ivory two inches square is large enough for her picture" her art should be given to the study of tiny things, to research, precision, and delicacy, all admirable qualities adapted to the patience and light touch of women.

This art, founded on minute observation of objects

borrowed from the immediate surroundings of the author, can only be a work of realism. Consecrated to the reproduction of familiar things, and average people, he will paint neither the ideal nor the rare in Nature or the human heart.

Does that mean that amongst all the forms of reality he will only notice those which are denuded of beauty ?

Certainly not. But the beauty which he will try to attain to—and will easily attain to—will be an average one, and not so brilliant that the light it irradiates cannot long be endured.

He will discover both in people and things a secret harmony, a latent grace, invisible to anyone before his revelation of them.

Without ever overstepping the limits of reality he will illuminate reality in a stream of mellow light which will make it more lovable, more worthy to be loved, in the eyes of us all.

The art to which we owe the portraits of Emma and Anne Elliot, the episode of the improvised amateur theatricals at Mansfield, the story of John Dashwood's struggle between his selfishness and his honour to his given word, is essentially the work of a realist.

To speak of realistic art is to employ a term which must be freshly defined, every time that it is applied to a fresh object, if the words are to have more than a purely formal meaning.

A modern writer* of fiction in the first rank, who combines profound psychology with subtle criticism, declares that all works are realistic whatever their form, if the artist has studied life, character, or thought with the purpose of attaining clarity in himself and of enlightening others.

Surely this was Jane Austen's aim.

* John Galsworthy. *Inn of Tranquillity.*

She does not busy herself with life as a whole. She is indifferent to the lot of humanity, but that only makes her all the more keenly interested in the thoughts and adventures of a small number of people, and it makes her anxious to reveal in her work motives which can justify her characters' actions in the eyes of a reasonable spectator.

Her desire for clarity is so intense that her psycho logical study always ends in a complete clearing-up in the solution of a kind of problem.

She always leads her characters from error, ignorance and doubt to truth, knowledge and certainty.

In dealing with the outer events of life her attitude, like that of all ardent realists, is equally definite and energetic.

For if there is one way of being a realist which consists only in reproducing what one " has seen from the window," there is yet another which while true to life does not bear immediate transposition from life to literature.

Such as it was conceived of by Defoe, Fielding, and Miss Burney, the realism of English fiction was tempered on the one hand by a conception of morality, clear if not strict, and on the other by the fact that these writers always depicted the manners of contemporary society.

Too short an interval and too powerful a reaction separated the eighteenth century novelists from the Restoration writers who had put their contemporaries on a pillory in long, wordy recitals of adventures on the model of the *Great Cyrus* and *Clelia.*

The story with a key, which became in the hands of Mrs. Manly a series of malicious portraits, at the beginning of the century, was perhaps fit for the form of pamphlet or satire, but could not be called a work of art.

To the narrow and inevitably falsified work of the "key" story the bold but faithful portrayal of life first carried out by Defoe was a striking contrast. Henceforward in the creation of a character the novelist was going to invest that character with far more points and features from the infinite variety of reality than could possibly be combined in one real person.

When, with the arrival of Miss Burney, the study of contemporary manners passed into the hands of women writers, realism maintained the same law and was more strictly confined to it than ever.

That, by the way, is one of the conditions under which feminine fiction is produced.

The intimate tone of *Evelina*, the scenes of home-life which it contains, entirely prevented the "little Burney" from taking any particular person in her circle as a model.

In *Pride and Prejudice* the woman novelist's circle becomes more and more restricted. The author may not demand more from reality in the way of material than sundry features and details to which thanks to happy arrangement she gives unique and original value.

Thus fiction satisfied the two conditions of being realistic and of avoiding "invasion of social proprieties," an offence which Miss Austen, with her natural reserve and her perfect tact as an accomplished woman of the world, was most careful to avoid.

On the contrary she remarks proudly :—

> "I am too proud of my gentlemen to admit that they were only Mr. A. or Colonel B."

To the initial element which inspires her in reality she adds a wealth of others from her creative imagination.

Although she is a good deal inspired by what she has seen, not a single scene or personage is merely a photograph.

Her subjects are always taken from the family life she loved and enjoyed so much; she is fond of presenting brothers and sisters, for instance, united by a deep and lively affection.

The peculiar tenderness between Jane and Elizabeth, or the Dashwood sisters, was no doubt inspired by her affection for her own beloved sister, and there are naval officers in several of the books, especially one charming young ensign whose open resolute face recalls that of Francis Austen, who was already a lieutenant at the age of seventeen.

Frank Churchill in *Emma* is the adopted son of a very rich uncle, as Edward Austen was that of a cousin, but in none of these cases has the actual truth supplied the author with more than a point of departure.

One Austen sister is not Ellinor Dashwood any more than the other is the romantic Marianne. William Price has nothing more in common with Francis or Charles Austen than his profession and his sterling character.

Profoundly imbued with the prejudices of her class, Jane Austen would not have cared to exile herself from it in her work by introducing scenes and persons that she really knew nothing about.

The sincerity of her realism and the strictness of this rule of never describing what she did not know by experience, is not unmixed, it must be confessed, with a certain lack of curiosity, and, more than that, a want of generous sympathy.

She does not content herself merely with confining herself, in writing, to her own circle and family; she eliminates even there all elements which do not seem to her suitable as material for a work of art.

The woman who is the writer of her letters has, as the correspondence bears witness, a fuller, more

active life, a life more in the open, than that which the "lady" author of *Pride and Prejudice* reproduces for us.

Isolated as Steventon and Chawton certainly were, aloof as their inhabitants were from all the preoccupations and events of the hour, they were less isolated and aloof from all the great currents of contemporary existence than the denizens of Mansfield and Highbury.

In order to arrive at that clear vision of reality which is the aim of her art, Jane Austen by dint of rigorous selection eliminated everything which did not strictly belong to the little group on which she was concentrating her attention.

And, then, more than all this, she deliberately turned her gaze away from everything betraying suffering—everything sad and ugly.

How, then, it may be objected, can we give the name of realism to this art which purges reality and prunes it of so many branches in order to present an ordered, simplified, clear, and joyful image of it ?

This simplification is not incompatible with realism. Her choice made, and all the discarded elements pushed on one side, Jane Austen's study of what remains is all the more minute and sincere.

When she is obliged by the exigencies of the plot to depict a sad and ugly reality she does not hesitate, and does not try to conceal one iota of the sombre truth.

Her artistic honesty compels her to apply the same sincerity to a description of poverty and disorder that she would make use of for the portrayal of luxury and tranquillity and easy circumstances. Her positive need of seeing clearly and describing frankly any truth which enters the field of her vision is expressed in a passage of *Mansfield Park* with a biting vigour which is almost surprising.

Reading this passage we must share Fanny Price's

depression in being transplanted from Mansfield to Portsmouth, and we cannot but realise her feeling of involuntary revolt and disgust, her feeling of being in exile.

"Fanny was deep in other musings. The remembrance of her first evening in that room, of her father and his newspaper came across her. No candle was *now* wanted. The sun was yet an hour and a half above the horizon. She felt that she had indeed been three months there, and the sun's rays falling strongly into the parlour instead of cheering, made her still more melancholy; for sunshine appeared to her a totally different thing in a town and in the country.

"Here its power was only a glare, a stifling, sickly glare, serving but to bring forward stains and dirt that might otherwise have slept. There was neither health, nor gaiety, nor sunshine in a town. She sat in a blaze of oppressive heat, in a cloud of moving dust, and her eyes could only wander from the walls marked by her father's head to the table cut and notched by her brothers, where stood the tea-board, never thoroughly cleaned, the cups and saucers wiped in streaks, the milk, a mixture of motes floating in thin blue, and the bread and butter growing every minute more greasy than even Rebecca's hands had first produced it."

This description for anyone who did not know its origin might quite reasonably be attributed to certain French masters of modern realism. This page, with its austere and poignant truthfulness, leaves us an impression of agony, and we can feel a vibration in the artist's pitiless sincerity, the vibration of a patrician's repugnance to the spectacle which disgusts her taste, and wounds an eye accustomed to the sight of order and beauty.

There is no other page in her work of the same order. If for once the sequence of events in the plot forced her to observe household squalor, in her study of character she refused to look at moral ugliness.

"Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can."

Yet she did not admit the right in herself or any novelist of falsifying the truth. The caprices of public opinion and the mode of the moment could not force her into a lack of the sincerity which she considered indispensable to a work of art. The heroines of eighteenth-century fiction, from Fielding's *Clarissa Harlowe* to Mrs. Radcliffe's *Emily*, are fragile creatures who, in spite of their delicate physiques, are able to endure mental shocks and physical fatigue which would prostrate the most robust of us.

In defiance of fashion, and exposing herself to the accusation of being a commonplace writer, lacking elegance, Jane Austen does not make her heroines undergo trials beyond all human endurance.

She never presents a young woman to her readers,

> "Who is reduced to support her father and herself by her talents, and work for her bread, continually cheated and defrauded by her hire, worn down to a skeleton and now and then starved to death."

She applies her respect for truth to the plot and characterisation, but also to the descriptive parts of her work.

Refusing to accept the new theories of picturesque beauty, which the romantic movement had introduced both into painting and literature, Jane Austen, through one of her characters, maintains that it is certainly a good thing to love and admire nature, but that the pursuit of the picturesque only is an affectation.

> "I do not like," said Edward Ferrars, "crooked, twisted, blasted trees. I admire them much more if they are tall, straight and flourishing. I do not like ruined, tattered cottages. I am not fond of nettles or thistles or heath blossoms. I have more pleasure in a snug farmhouse than a watch-tower—and a troop of tidy, happy villagers please me better than the finest banditti in the world."

It is not that Jane Austen, faithful to the tradition of her race and surroundings, has not a profound pleasure in the charm of a landscape.

What she does deprecate in the cult of the picturesque is the importance which is attached to the exceptional, and the disdain meted out to the gentle and familiar aspect of the English countryside. This disdain of the reality at hand in the English landscape, and the corresponding admiration in lovers of the picturesque for the distant beauties of the Alps and Pyrrenees (which she herself had never seen), is in her eyes almost unpardonable. Though much more powerful than the whims of fashion, neither had the moralistic and didactic tendencies of her epoch enough influence to drag her away from her adherence to strict realism.

At that time, when all the eighteenth century novelists were in some degree educators or moralists, all running religious, political or moral theories in their books, this young woman cared nothing for converting or instructing anyone.

She looks at life as an artist, fixes her impressions and quite omits to add an edifying text. Not one of her novels contains one line which a woman and a " lady " brought up in a parsonage could regret having written, but not one, though from time to time we may draw a moral from it, was written with that object in view.

The author of *Evelina* tells us in her preface that it is intended to instruct as well as to amuse the reader, that virtue is rewarded there, and that malice, envy, anger and jealousy are soundly punished.

The realism of *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Pride and Prejudice* could not accommodate itself to such puerile artifice.

In these books, as in life, we see virtue and popularity, or the power of pleasing, sometimes rewarded beyond their merits, and sometimes passed over altogether. Sometimes lack of wit and an insignificant face will serve their owner quite as well as beauty and the highest qualities of mind.

> "When a young lady is to be a heroine, the perverseness of forty surrounding families cannot prevent her. Something must and will happen to throw a hero in her way."

As we have noted, Jane Austen pays little attention to setting in her fiction, but once in a way she does accord to it the same minute attention that is expended on other branches of her art.

Her longest and most complete description of lansdscape has an exquisite sharpness in the lines, to which a good deal of singularly felicitous detail is added. I take it from *Persuasion* :—

> "They were come too late in the year for any amusement or variety which Lyme as a public place might offer; the rooms were shut up, the lodgers almost all gone, scarcely any family but of the residents left—and, as there is nothing to admire in the buildings themselves, the remarkable situation of the town, the principal street almost hurrying into the water, the walk to the Cobb, skirting round a pleasant little bay, which, in the season, is animated with bathing-machines and company, the Cobb itself, its old wonders and new improvements with the very beautiful line of cliffs stretching out to the east of the town, are what the stranger's eye will seek, and a very strange stranger it must be who does not see charms in the immediate environs of Lyme to make him wish to know it better. The scenes in its neighbourhood, Charmouth with its high grounds and extensive sweeps of country and still more its sweet retired bay, backed by dark cliffs where fragments of low rock among the sands make it the happiest spot for watching the flow of tide, for sitting in unwearied contemplation; the woody varieties of the village of Up Lyme; and, above all, Pinny, with its green chasms between romantic rocks, where the scattered

> forest trees and orchards of luxuriant growth declare that many a generation must have passed away since the partial falling of the cliff prepared the ground for such a state, where a scene so wonderful and so lovely is exhibited, as may more than equal any of the resembling scenes of the far-famed Isle of Wight. These places must be visited, and visited again to make the worth of Lyme understood."

Such a passage proves that Jane Austen can paint a *décor* simply and skilfully if she has a mind to.

Why, we may ask, does she almost always neglect to do so? Why is Anne Elliot unseeing in the streets of Bath and why is she never permitted to cast a glance at the picturesque villa of Beau Nash with the varied and beautiful scenery of its position?

Why does Jane Austen, so sensitive as we know to the charm of nature, enjoying as she does so keenly the delicate festivals of line and colour afforded by the landscape of Southern England, loving as she does, the fine trees, the "beloved elms" of the Steventon garden almost as a sister, why, we ask again, does she almost entirely eliminate from her work all these things whose beauty was so dear to her?

There seems to be some opposition between the tastes of the woman and the tastes of the artist. This opposition, however, is only apparent; her essential conception of her art obliged her to sacrifice the setting to the action and to her analysis of character.

Her fine brushwork would have been lost against any other background than a flat and neutral-tinted wash.

When an artist is working on a small canvas (and here again we must remember the Primitives), and wants to concentrate the interest in his figures, he must necessarily simplify the background.

A novelist working in a restricted space must do the same.

Comparing her work with others more boldly treated and on a larger scale we are struck by the differences which separate the patient, finely-shaded work of Jane Austen from all other literary art less rare in form but more striking.

The suggestive power of landscape when the outer aspect is in relation to some psychological phenomenon has perhaps never been better expressed than by the short quiet remarks of Jane Austen on the unique charm of an English landscape.

> "The considerable slope at near the foot of which the Abbey stood, gradually acquired a steeper form beyond its grounds; and at half a mile distance was a bank of considerable abruptness and grandeur, well-clothed with wood, and at the bottom of this bank, favourably placed and sheltered, rose the Abbey Mill Farm, with meadows in front and the river making a close and handsome curve round it.
>
> "It was a sweet view—sweet to the eye and to the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort seen under a bright sun without being oppressive."

Compared with this infinitely suggestive reserve a more vigorous and dramatic technique seems violent, almost brutal. To be convinced of this we have only to compare this passage with a page from *Jane Eyre*, where Charlotte Brontë makes the power of the hurricane an echo of the surging tempest in her heroine's heart :—

> "But what had befallen the night? The moon was not yet set, and we were all in shadow; I could scarcely see my master's face, near as I was. And what ailed the chestnut tree? It writhed and groaned; while wind roared in the laurel-walk and came sweeping over us."

The quality of her art as well as her conception of the relation between fiction and reality obliges Jane Austen to treat Nature with the same reserve that she treats love

In her letters she frankly dwells on her love of Nature, but she cannot bring herself to do so in her work.

Too many novelists have displayed a complacent verbosity in descriptions of moonlight or nights of storm to incline her to follow their example.

Her delicate fastidiousness of taste discovers something theatrical and spectacular, too visible an artifice, in the poetry of moonlight or the outburst of a storm, in literature.

If she does now and then draw attention to a landscape it is more a suggestion than a finished painting.

She does not make her image so complete that by giving full satisfaction to the eye it leaves nothing to the imagination. She disapproves of too much sensibility to the beauty of nature quite as much as she dislikes deliberate insistence on the picturesque or the exceptional in the *décor* of a novel.

It was not in her to discern the sincerity which is certainly existent, though concealed in tangled folds of exaggeration, in romances of the Radcliffe School.

Also it was impossible to move her by the touching evocation of a Margiana or an Emily watering with her own frail hands the few flower-pots which are her only consolation in the house of a cruel ravisher where she is imprisoned.

Jane Austen does not fail to impress on us the disdain which such images arouse in her.

Simultaneously with the expression of her evident tenderness for trees and flowers in her letters we get her witty comments in *Northanger Abbey* upon the inevitable love of flowers common to all the poor sentimental heroines of Mrs. Radcliffe.

From the beginning we find that in one respect Catherine Morland was quite unworthy of being a

heroine in the eyes of readers of the day; she was absolutely indifferent to the beauty of flowers.

For Jane Austen will not admit that love of Nature is exclusively a quality of rare beings.

From her point of view it is not an indisputable sign of a commonplace soul to be unprovided with a passionate love of Nature.

She herself "cherishes" trees, and finds a "foretaste of Paradise" in the gentle beauty of a familiar landscape, but, in her opinion, such sentiments are not to be dragged into public view in season and out of season.

And, indeed, how could we expect Jane Austen to understand the real capacity and significance of the return to Nature, the whole-hearted ecstasy before its beauty and majesty which had already been expressed by Mrs. Radcliffe and her imitators.

Her attitude is that of a being for whom the whole romantic movement meant nothing at all, of a being interested in humanity alone, in whose estimation the whole resource of Nature exists only for the service of man.

There is another element in reality for which Jane Austen has no tenderness and very little attention; the element of animal life. On this point her insensibility is such that her art suffers by it.

Although she expresses less love of Nature in her work than she really feels, she ignores animals because they inspire her neither with interest nor affection.

Exclusively occupied with human characters and faces, that comedy of the drawing-room which her fiction essentially is, has no place in it for the life of animals.

Neither Darcy, nor Mr. Knightley, nor even Tom Bertram out shooting, are ever accompanied by a

favourite dog. Never does Elizabeth Bennet or Emma Woodhouse interrupt one of her important reveries to respond to a patient canine gaze full of humble tenderness, never does one of them stoop down to caress a gentle questing muzzle with a friendly abstracted touch.

Miss Mitford, however, in a few delightful pages of *Our Village* and later Charlotte Brontë, consider horse and dog as worthy of consideration and sympathy.

The spaniel "Mayflower," who is the companion of the small Lizzie's laughter and gambols in *Our Village*, the huge Newfoundland, Pilot, who runs beside Mr. Rochester's horse when he rides out, looking like the "*weir*-wolf" of Scandinavian legend in the twilight, could never have been tolerated on the lawns of Mansfield Park or in the shrubberies where Mr. Woodhouse took his constitutional of fifteen minutes per diem, sheltered from wind or heat or dust.

The bond between man and his beast is something for which Jane Austen has a blind spot in her composition.

She can only see the ridiculous side of it and paints it only in exaggeration, as when she points out that Lady Bertram is more concerned about her pug than her children, and bestows on her ugly little dog care and attention which her folly and selfishness make her incapable of according to worthier objects.

A letter written at the time of the publication of *Pride and Prejudice* brings out in an interesting manner the difference of method between Jane Austen and her predecessors and contemporaries.

Though she cannot explain why, it seems to her that her book lacks substance, and she asks herself whether she ought not to have interrupted the flow of the plot by interposing irrelevant episodes here and there.

The particular charm of her book for us, makes her uneasy. She doubts whether the plot should unfold itself without one of those digressions so common in the fiction of the day.

There is more than a purely formal difference in this.

Rapid, simple and direct, without an intermediary who interrupts the succession of the events of the story, this book is conceived and executed after a very different formula from that usually employed in English fiction.

Artists like Fielding, Smollett or Sterne had not concerned themselves much with composition.

Whatever their inspiration in reality, their work is a solid tissue of tangled threads; it is many-sided, powerful, logical at times, illogical at others, as real life often is.

Into a work of this kind the author flings by handfuls anything that he gathers at the wayside in the course of a wide adventurous life, flowers or weeds it matters not, they are flung in pell-mell, all together; art for him consists in reproducing reality as fully and as faithfully as possible.

He does not attempt to give the reader a clear and ordered vision of life.

Like those engravings of Hogarth which give us busy crowds in a mass which at first sight seem nothing but confusion, the fiction of Fielding, Smollett and Sterne do not at first reading appear to have a definite plan or design, nor are they clearly illumined. Jane Austen's artistic conception is the very opposite of this large way of doing things, which results in luxuriant but disorderly growth.

A totally different genius from that of her predecessors is expressing itself in her clear perspective and simple, faultless lines. By her purity of form, harmony of

arrangement, nimbleness of style, her work is an absolute novelty in the history of English literature.

Whether it be a question of characters or of setting, Jane Austen's art is always objective.

It attains its highest point of perfection when it is rigorously impersonal and the artist herself entirely disappears behind the work.

In two of her novels, *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park*, she attempts now and then to intervene as showman of her marionettes, but this rôle, which was a favourite one of Thackeray's, did not suit her temperament in the least.

The form which is most appropriate to her talent was found in novels like *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice* and gave them incomparable artistic perfection, and it is a form which is almost dramatic by reason of the swift flow of the story and the powerful and well-considered contractions or abbreviations.

The description properly speaking is no more than the indications of scenery that would be found in a play. It just places the characters and shows the reader just so much as he would learn of a play from the faces and costumes of the actors.

Then the comedy is unfolded, and up to its climax the actors reveal themselves directly through their conversation, their gestures, their actions, and sometimes too in a reverie, which by its basis and as well as its form might well be considered a dramatic monologue.

The author is bent on distilling from all appearances their essential psychological significance.

In every outer manifestation she sees the indication of a deeper reality, a revelation of character and temperament, and therefore she never notes word or a detail merely for their picturesque effect, and uses such exquisite economy that she never deals with anything

unimportant or unnecessary in spite of its apparent significance at the moment.

The spiritual and mental parts of her characters being serene and satisfied, their lives easy and harmonious, their most serious deliberations never rise above the tone of conversation between well-bred people.

And further, because Jane Austen really adopts the methods of a dramatist, certain moments of the action, certain episodes in the plot which she contents herself with presenting without explanation, remain mysterious and rouse our curiosity right up to the *dénouement.*

Thus it is that Mr. Knightley's jealousy of Frank Churchill makes him behave in a manner which is inexplicable to Emma and to readers up to the last scene of the comedy.

> " Shortly afterwards Miss Bates passing near the window, descried Mr. Knightley on horseback not far off.
>
> " ' Mr. Knightley, I declare ! I must speak to him, if possible, just to thank him. I will not open the window here ; it will give you all cold ; but I can go into my mother's room, you know. I daresay he will come in when he knows who is here. Quite delightful to have you all meet so ! Our little room is so honoured ! '
>
> " She was in the adjoining chamber while she spoke, and, opening the casement there, immediately called Mr. Knightley's attention, and every syllable of their conversation was as distinctly heard by others as if it passed within the same apartment.
>
> " ' How d'ye do ? How d'ye do ? ' ' Very well, I thank you. So much obliged to you for the carriage last night. We were just in time ; my mother just ready for us. Pray come in. Do come in. You will find some friends here.'
>
> " So began Miss Bates ; and Mr. Knightley seemed determined to be heard in his turn, for most resolutely and commandingly did he say :—
>
> " ' How is your niece, Miss Bates ? I want to inquire after you all ; but particularly your niece. How is Miss Fairfax ? I hope she caught no cold last night. How is she to-day ? Tell me how Miss Fairfax is ? '

"And Miss Bates was obliged to give a direct answer before he would hear anything else. The listeners were amused; and Mrs. Weston gave Emma a look of particular meaning. But Emma still shook her head in steady scepticism.

"'So obliged to you! so very much obliged to you for the carriage,' resumed Miss Bates. He cut her short with—

"'I am going to Kingston. Can I do anything for you?'

"'Oh dear, Kingston—are you? Mrs. Cole was saying the other day she wanted something from Kingston.'

"'Mrs. Cole has servants to send. Can I do anything for *you*?'

"'No, I thank you. But do come in. Who do you think is here? Miss Woodhouse and Miss Smith; so kind as to call and hear the new pianoforte. Do put up your horse at the Crown, and come in.'

"'Well,' he said in a deliberating manner, 'for five minutes perhaps.'

"'And here is Mrs. Weston and Mr. Frank Churchill too! Quite delightful. So many friends.'

"'No, not now, I thank you. I could not stay two minutes. I must get on to Kingston as fast as I can.'

"'Oh, do come in. They will be so very happy to see you.'

"'No, no; your room is full enough.'"

Up to the moment when Mr. Knightley confesses that he has been jealous of the handsome Churchill, Emma can never guess the reason for this abrupt change of mind and this almost snappish refusal.

This method has a double advantage; it is more living than any other, and, still more important, it excites the interest of the reader and demands of him as much continued active collaboration as a play demands of the spectator.

Related, these small incidents in the life of everyday people would be tiresome and puerile, but as *actors* these people of rather flat character gain the point and incisive value which it would be difficult to supply them with in any other way.

Life and its movement, its continual onward flow and constant change, even when almost unconscious, are thus revealed in all their variety in a succession of scenes which at first seem to be all very much alike, in conversations, where the most futile expressions all concur in the development of the plot and add some new feature to the portrait of a character.

Every one of Jane Austen's novels contains whole pages, even whole chapters, where if a few lines were suppressed and the speakers' names were printed before their remarks the novel would be converted into a drawing-room comedy or pastoral play.

* The dramatic tendency in her work is so striking that it suggested to one of Jane Austen's numerous feminine admirers the possibility of arranging a series of duologues for acting, from the novels.

One cannot be surprised that the attempt is only doubtfully successful, but it is an experiment not without interest all the same, for it is more faithful to the artistic conception of the author of *Pride and Prejudice* than one might suppose.

As a matter of fact a letter dated 1813 shows that Jane Austen was accustomed to note down dialogue in her first sketch of a novel more as if it were written for the stage than for the actual purpose in view.

She writes to her sister on the subject of the publication of *Pride and Prejudice.*

> " A ' said he ' or ' said she ' would sometimes make the dialogue more immediately clear, but ' I do not write for such dull elves ' as have not a great deal of ingenuity themselves. The second volume is shorter than I could wish but the difference is not so much in reality as in look, there being a larger proportion of narrative in that part."

* Dialogues and Scenes from the Novels of Jane Austen, arranged for drawing-room performance by Rosina Filippi, with illustrations by Miss Fletcher. Published by T. M. Dent.

How is it that Jane Austen, whose real bent was far more towards play-writing than fiction, never wrote a play, and why did she not even make any other attempt at it than that fragment, entitled *The Mystery*, which dates from her first youth?

She was chiefly withheld from it by the reserve natural to a girl of her upbringing, which she carried to the point of conscientious scruple, which did not diminish as time went on, to judge by this passage from *Mansfield Park*.

> "'Now, Edmund, do not be disagreeable,' said Julia. 'Nobody loves a play better than you do, or can have gone much further to see one.' 'True, to see real acting, good hardened real acting; but I would hardly walk from this room to the next to look at the raw efforts of those who have not been bred to the trade—a set of gentlemen and ladies who have all the disadvantages of education and decorum to struggle through.'"

A woman of Jane Austen's social position might greatly enjoy the talent of Kean, Kemble or Mrs. Siddons, but the rules of "education and decorum" which forbid her to appear on the stage were equally potent to withhold her from writing works which could not be given to the public in so discreet and anonymous a fashion as novels can.

A "lady" could send a manuscript to a publisher without renouncing the anonymity considered suitable for such an occasion.

And if this work is composed, as Jane Austen's three first novels were—for the amusement of the author's family and to occupy her during long, empty, monotonous hours, is not the novel the most suitable form in which to fulfil these various conditions?

Add to all this the influence which the novels of Richardson and Miss Burney exercised over her when she was about eighteen.

She felt impelled to choose the same medium for self-expression as that of her favourite authors.

Perhaps in more favourable conditions Jane Austen would have carried on the tradition of Goldsmith and Sheridan in brilliant comedies of manners.

But can one after all regret that she did not, since her gift for dramatic representation instead of introducing a want of balance into her fiction only gives it savour and a more lively and original form than it would otherwise have had.

In giving the most important place to action and direct revelation of character in her fiction, which leads to the immediate creation of an image or opinion in the mind of a reader, Jane Austen attained the perfection of her art.

In spite of the sincerity of her realism this art is more than reproduction ; it is creation.

Every character possesses an independent existence and carries the law and rhythm of his being within himself.

Whether it be a comic character or one of those heroines to whom we involuntarily attribute the grace and modest charm and wit of Miss Austen herself, the personage moves freely of his or her own volition, in conformity with the character in question, without ever giving us the impression that the will of the creator intervenes.

Dangerous as we cannot but feel Macaulay's famous comparison of Jane Austen with Shakespeare to be, one may say that the dramatic power which set figures moving in the shady alleys of Mansfield Park, in the Bath Assembly Rooms, or in Mrs. Weston's drawing-room is the gift which placed Jane Austen not far below the greatest artists and most powerful creators of Time ; and keeps her there.

One of the essentials for a work of art is the power in the artist to discover the secret of harmonizing and balancing the various elements of which it is composed.

Entire and uninterrupted accord between the end in view and the means employed to reach it, indispensable in every form of art, is more than ever indispensable in the art of writing; the subject of a novel and its style must be in close and constant correspondence.

Side by side with this is the fact that one cannot properly estimate the style of an author without considering the ends to which it is meant to attain.

To dissect Jane Austen's style as if it were a dead thing, taking words or phrases presenting such and such a characteristic would be a tiresome and useless task; like the subjects of her novels her style is simple, has unity without effort, without affectation, without any other originality than that supplied by its perfect simplicity and spontaneity.

Other artists may know how to express profound thought in magnificent and sonorous prose, but Jane Austen is content to hit on the clearest and most accurate expression of that average reality in all things which it pleases her to present.

In *Cecilia*, by Miss Burney, and in Miss Edgeworth's *Belinda*, it is the choice of the most appropriate terms for the subject in hand that Jane Austen admires, and it is that "most appropriate" expression which she herself employs for the painting of a scene or the revelation of a character in a word.

The subjects that she chooses being always taken from the tranquil easy life of well-to-do people her style never goes out of a middle key, never leaves the discreet and measured note of a drawing-room conversation in her day. Accustomed from infancy to hear pure and correct English spoken round her, even in the

most everyday conversations, she writes what comes naturally without giving her style any consideration, sure that she will have done well enough if she can succeed in giving to the remarks of a Mr. Knightley, a Darcy, or an Anne Elliot the very turn and ring that they would have had in similar circumstances in real life.

The one rule that she makes for epistolary style in one of her letters would apply equally well to the style of her novels :

> "I have now attained the true art of letter-writing, which we are always told is to express on paper exactly what one would say to the same person by word of mouth. I have been talking to you almost as fast as I could the whole of this letter."

One may glean one or two sardonic comments on the "fine writing" in vogue towards 1798, from *Northanger Abbey*.

> "I do not talk well enough to be incomprehensible."

says the naïve Catherine Morland, and Henry Tilney answers that this remark is

> "Good criticism of the language of the day."

The art of writing well consists in saying exactly what one means to express, in such a manner that everybody may understand it. The half-jocular, half-serious reflections of young Tilney on the use of the word "nice" is an indication of an exquisitely fine instinct for exactitude in expression both in the character who pronounces these comments and in the author who attributes them to him.

> "'This is a very *nice* day,' he says. 'We are taking a very nice walk, and you are two very nice young ladies. Oh! it is a very nice word indeed—it does for everything."

For Catherine had made a fatuously wrong use of this detested monosyllable.

> " Originally," he went on, " perhaps it was applied only to express neatness, propriety, delicacy or refinement . . . but now every commendation on every subject is comprised in that one word."

Almost equally with exactitude and clarity Jane Austen values beat, and rhythm, in prose. It is to her constant anxiety to give harmonious simplicity to a phrase that she alludes when she complains of " so much labour " expended on every novel.

But in perusing the pages that her niece begged her to criticise she only falls upon

> " expressions which are too colloquial and quite without distinction,"

for they, to her, are the shocking ones.

She remarks to her niece that a man of the world would not exclaim " God bless my soul ! " forgetting—and this forgetfulness makes us smile—that Emma under the influence of great surprise and emotion had allowed the words : " Good God ! " to escape her, and even went so far as to ask of God, His blessing, aloud, which apparently men of the world must shy at, if they are to be considered men of the world.

The artistic intuition which makes her efface herself behind her characters, makes her always describe impersonally anything which her characters cannot tell us themselves, makes her neglect effects of style, choice of language, and graces of form which have nothing to do with her subject and would only be so much embroidery upon it.

For the very reason that her books contain so little narrative and descriptive matter, they do not contain any brilliant worked-up pages which stand out from the rest.

Her phrases with their long stride and supple rhythm move forward harmoniously with no artifice or affecta-

tion about them. They are well constructed not so much because their author has made an effort to make them elegant but because her thought is always clear and expresses itself naturally with a crystalline sparkle and exactitude.

One might count on the fingers of one hand the passages where Jane Austen has probably sought out a certain effect and has employed one of those devices of repetition or alliteration so frequent among English prose-writers as well as with English poets.

> "It was a sweet view—sweet to the eye and mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright without being oppressive."

This extract is from *Emma* and is an example of one of Jane Austen's few consciously attained effects.

Simple, natural and attaining unity, her style, like so much else in her fiction, has never aged. It is only in rare passages that it bears any mark of period.

There are few words or phrases employed at a certain time by the best and worst writers alike to be found in Jane Austen's work, expressions by which one may recognise the tone and the mode of such and such a date.

To date the books exactly one is obliged to note the appearance of some custom in them which has since fallen into disuse.

One may notice that country-dances were in vogue in ball-rooms, that people travelled by post-chaise, that a man would *ride* up to London to make some purchases in the capital, and so on and so on . . . .

In the same way, peculiarities of grammar and syntax may be noted as characteristic of eighteenth-century language, differentiating it from modern English. For example : "Tea was carrying round." "Being spoke to." "She has been acting wrong."

It is not the least of the proofs of the genial originality and unerring taste of Jane Austen to observe the clear, rapid, expressive style in which she wrote as a young girl in 1796 quite as well as twenty years later, a style so far removed from the stiff-jointed emphatic Johnsonian prose that we cannot cease from marvelling at the agile movement and real originality of it.

Among the few worn-out expressions that she uses, which have taken a step down in the world, there are two, "elegant" and "genteel," which come often from her pen, and do not fail to surprise the uninstructed reader, who is astonished to find what appears to be an almost vulgar note in a whole of such harmonious discretion.

One or two expressions in her earlier works recall the craze for such works as *Clelia* and *The Great Cyrus* in England as well as in France. The ponderous adverbs, dear to the heart of Mademoiselle de Scudéry, and the *Précieuses*, the "superbly," the "magnificently," perpetually marshalled by Molière had quite a lasting vogue on the other side of the Channel. Right up to the last decade of the eighteenth century a girl who is admired is voted "monstrous pretty," an amiable person is "vastly civil," "vastly obliging."

The presence of such expressions in the novels written at Steventon, expressions which were getting out of date in 1795 and were quite done for in 1810, supplies important evidence as to the amount of revision which *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* underwent. One would imagine that the author only made very slight alterations in 1811 and 1813 to these two novels written in 1796 and 1798, since she allowed such out-of-date epithets to remain in them, though she never used them in the novels she was writing in this her later period of activity.

Between the pompous style of Miss Burney in *Cecilia* and especially *Camilla*, and the simple, rapid, precision of Jane Austen, there lies the difference of a whole century, although there was really only one generation between the two writers.

The younger of the two, who always professed the liveliest admiration for her celebrated elder, was never in the least influenced by *Evelina* or *Cecilia*.

It seems that she read them for the same reason that she read novels of the romantic school in her childhood: "in order to learn what faults to avoid in writing."

Unconsciously perhaps, because her taste was all for economy and precision in expression, she lighted on a style when she set out to write, of which the movement and rhythm were quite original.

The great prose-writers of the eighteenth century, Johnson and Burke, the great novelists, above all Richardson, whom Jane Austen unreservedly admired, had something in their style which brings to mind the ample rhythm and massive construction of the masters of Latin prose.

Miss Burney, making a great effort to write fine prose, imitated the solemnity of the classic phrase to such good purpose that occasionally in *Cecilia* her language becomes unintelligible. Jane Austen borrowed nothing either from the best or the worst of her predecessors. Without troubling herself to write finely, the author of six exquisite works of literary art gave her thought form in a style which rapid, economical, biting and clear as crystal, has all the modern qualities of English prose.

As she had always lived far removed from contact with the centres of literary activity of her day, Jane Austen's work is as original in form as in foundation.

Her work remains distinct from all others and cannot be classified among English works of the period.

Finding it quite uninfluenced, we also find it difficult to trace the hidden sources of this work. It does not seem to proceed directly either from the classical or romantic school as they existed in English literature of the eighteenth century.

Its sobriety and distinction give it no relation at all with all that was theatrical, spectacular and false in the Radcliffe School.

Mystery and terror are utterly banished, even to the elements of romanticism which are combined with the classicism of Goldsmith and the realism of Fielding and Smollett.

The legacy from picaresque romance, the breath of mock-heroic adventure to be found in the pages of *Tom Jones* or *Peregrine Pickle* and which sweep like a whirlwind through the peaceable inhabitants of Wakefield, never blows through the leafy shades of Mansfield Park or Pemberly.

On the one hand, Jane Austen's art outsteps romanticism to attain the entire sincerity of modern realism; on the other, it more or less adopts the classical formula as it is presented not in *The Vicar of Wakefield* but in our *Princesse de Clèves.*

Clarity, precision, balance and the beat of a rhythm, all the points which characterize classic art are found in her work, made one, and harmonized just as they are in French literature of the seventeenth century.

Whether this relationship was absolutely fortuitous—as all that we know of Jane Austen would incline us to believe—or whether it was due to the action of a secret affinity—the little Countess Feuillide perhaps brought French books to Steventon—it gives us the explanation of a fact often pointed out by the English critics, the

fact of that unique quality, that originality which made the art of Jane Austen an isolated phenomenon in English literature.

Transposed from Court life to family life, these novels have, through their ordered simplicity and purity of style, a distinction which recalls the unassuming charm of Madame de la Fayette's fiction, and the exquisite grace, "the not too much of anything," which later on was dictated by the delicate taste of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse. In the midst of the huge and solid edifices raised by the great masters of eighteenth-century English fiction, sometimes decorated with disconcerting wealth of fantasy, the fiction of Jane Austen may be compared to a little temple of white columns with a pediment, pure in line.

Though rare in England the quiet distinction of line which makes all its beauty has nothing exotic about it.

The altar within, will never lack worshippers. For this altar is consecrated to a god sacred to English earth and the English race, the god of humour, whose smile curves a sardonic lip, while his eyes fix a glance of singular penetration wherever they come to rest.

CHAPTER IV

HUMOUR AND SATIRE

THOUGH it is only by minute and profound analysis that we can really define and classify humour, yet it is easy to draw clear lines of demarcation between its infinitely varied forms.

Instead of taking into consideration the opinion which the humorist desires to provoke in the reader, it is enough to seek out the reasons which have induced an artist capable of direct expression of thought and his vision of reality to take up the mask which humour really is.

There are writers whose mind and intuition travel beyond the appearances of things, who are brought to sum up life as cruel and illogical by the daily, almost hourly, spectacle of suffering, doubt, and evil which life affords.

In time they come to feel nothing but disgust and indignation for life.

Others there are who, having learnt to see things in a more rose-coloured light, are yet perfectly aware of the possibilities for evil in human nature, of the injustice and irony of fate.

But as they are more indulgent, or probably less sensitive, they do not fly into a rage.

They are content to smile and contrive to get some diversion from the spectacle of sufferings which

might conceivably fall to their own lot, although they fervently hope not.

For those who rage and rebel, equally with the scoffers and railers, humour is a weapon or a shield ; it is a protestation of their sensibility and intelligence before an aspect of reality which they are able to look in the face and sum up, although they can have no hope of ameliorating its conditions.

Filled with a biting acidity, cold with an even more incisive frostiness, humour is the bitter fruit of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

It is founded at the same time on knowledge of reality, on close contact with concrete reality and on the deeply hidden meaning which appearances present to the philosophical spectator.

Among the many forms of humour those which may be called " defensive " are always the richest.

The revolt of both heart and reason to be found in them gives them a profoundly human note ; the indignation, scorn, and sometimes hate which they express, mastered and concentrated in satire, take on vigour, emphasis and scope which are incomparable.

But humour may bubble up from shallower sources, and may shed a far softer light upon reality.

The mask of indifference or playfulness, which most often conceals a bitter or tragic face, serves sometimes to heighten the value of the comic side of life and to give it a more expressive form.

Thus, from a weapon, humour is transformed into the marvellous instrument of a pleasure that is all the greater, an intellectual satisfaction that is all the keener, the further it is removed from the noisy vulgarity of those external manifestations, joking and laughter.

A picture of life drawn by a witness of pitilessly clear

vision, or by an amused and attentive spectator, humour is always, as we know, a transposition from the grave to the gay, from emotion to insensibility, or from any other condition to its opposite.

This transposition, indispensable for the production of humour, implies in any one who is capable of it a self-mastery and a control of his or her reactions, to which the spontaneity and vivacity of the female being rarely attains.

While most of the English novelists are humorists as well, novelists in general do not handle humour skilfully.

In the eighteenth century, Richardson is, however, the only male novelist who is quite incapable of expressing his thought in an ironic or transposed key. While, on the other hand, neither Miss Burney, who had a sense of the comic often to the point of the grotesque or of caricature, nor the solemn Miss Edgeworth, had the smallest sense of humour.

The work of Charlotte Brontë, aflame with passion and genius, shows not a flash of irony, and although George Eliot created admirable humorous types her wide and powerful vision of reality contains a great number of aspects to which humour is entirely strange.

With Jane Austen alone, humour, instead of being a mode of expression employed on occasion and in certain circumstances, appears on every page.

It is for her, as for those two great masters of irony, Sterne and Swift, the customary attitude in the face of reality.

In a letter which we have quoted, addressed by Jane Austen in 1816 to the librarian of the Prince Regent, she explains, as well as her horror of abstraction and philosophical reflection will allow her, the only attitude which, as a novelist, she is capable of.

She declares that she cannot be constrained by a subject that is too serious to a gravity which she will be incapable of keeping up.

She must, she says, be able to laugh at herself and others.

Her humour does indeed express perpetual amusement at the spectacle of things.

But there is moderation in the mockery of her laughter, of which the irony is neither sour nor bitter, and though it has no deep resonance possesses other qualities besides its subtlety and light-footed grace.

Although avoiding any wide conclusions, although expressing love and acceptance of life as it is, it is clear-sighted enough, truthful and strong enough to bring to light the falsities of vanity and folly.

There is a singular resemblance between the various elements which compose the work of Jane Austen. Her psychology, as we have already seen, is never removed from the daylight regions of intelligence and only includes elements which are ordered by reason and follow each other to their logical conclusion.

Reason and logic preside equally over her art, which is addressed to the mind in order that it may conform to the demands of that which it claims ; it is given a simplified form, and imparts the greatest importance to clarity, simple line and precision.

Its incessant demand is for complete comprehension. It does not seek to stir our emotions, and does not drag out or prolong in vibration the idea or the image which has been translated into selected and measured terms.

Now, Jane Austen's use of humour is closely related to this artistic conception, and, to her psychology, entirely concerned with the mind.

Her treatment of humour, expressing as it does a vision of reality and a philosophy of life which do not

plumb the depths (like her art and her psychology), is confined to the rapid expression of those gestures, words and attitudes which reveal personality.

Such a treatment of humour, which puts before us the absurdity of an action that we may measure its scope without coming to any other opinion upon it, is decidedly rare.

It implies implicit approval and tacit acceptance of everything life has to offer.

Spared by this acquiescence from any subsequent necessity of suggesting a moral or effective judgment (since, looking life in the face, the humorist finds it good and worthy of love) her irony only serves to point out and emphasise the amusing contrasts which real life incessantly provides.

As she finds the same logic in life and in herself, as she neither hears nor seeks to hear any dissonances in the universal harmony, this humorist only draws attention to the superficial infringements of the laws of reason which occur in life.

For her humour springs from the verification and the statement of examples of the illogical and the mistaken, and has no other source than the contrast between reason, the eternal law of the intelligible world, and the absurdity which certain characters and certain facts present.

Her humour will never arouse in us indignation, revolt, or pity, to which she is a complete stranger herself.

In her hands a person who might otherwise be regarded as odious merely interests and amuses us because his attitude and activity, instead of being presented from an average point of view which necessarily implies moral judgment, are regarded solely according to their relations with reason.

Led by the artist who is determined to laugh at herself and others, we are made witnesses of a discussion between Mrs. Dashwood and her husband in the second chapter of *Sense and Sensibility*. In this chapter, where Jane Austen's sense of humour is given its most characteristic play, we have a reasoned, lucid, and perfectly serious and solid exposition used to support a false theory.

This suborned logic is put at the service of cupidity and egoism.

But there is no design on the author's part of making us follow up such failings to their conclusion, rather she merely desires that we shall share her amusement at the irresistible argument of Mrs. Dashwood.

John Dashwood has to decide what he will do to provide for his stepmother and her three daughters who were recommended to his care by his father, who had died unable to leave them anything.

John Dashwood's first idea is to settle an annuity on his stepmother, but his wife soon makes him realise the dangers and inconveniences of such an undertaking :—

> " If you observe, people always live for ever when there is any annuity to be paid them ; and she is very stout and healthy and hardly forty. An annuity is a very serious business ; it comes over and over every year, and there is no getting rid of it. You are not aware of what you are doing. I have known a great deal of trouble of annuities ; for my mother was clogged with the payment of three to old superannuated servants by my father's will, and it is amazing how disagreeable she found it.
>
> " Twice every year these annuities were to be paid, and then there was the trouble of getting it to them, and then one of them was said to have died, and it turned out afterwards to be no such thing. My mother was quite sick of it. Her income was not her own, she said, with such perpetual claims on it, and it was the more unkind in my father,

because, otherwise the money would have been entirely at my mother's disposal. . . . I am convinced within myself that your father had no idea of your giving them any money at all. The assistance he thought of I daresay was only such as might be reasonably expected of you; for instance, such as looking out for a comfortable, small house for them, helping them to move their things, and sending them presents of fruit and game, and so forth, whenever they are in season. I'll lay my life that he meant nothing further; indeed, it would be very strange and unreasonable if he did . . . altogether they will have five hundred a year amongst them, and what on earth can four women want for more than that? They will live so cheap! their housekeeping will be nothing at all! They will have no carriage, no horses, and hardly any servants; they will keep no company, and can have no expenses of any kind! . . . Five hundred a year! I am sure I cannot imagine how they will spend half of it! and as for your giving them more, it is absurd to think of it!"

In order to appreciate the contrast between a person's opinion of himself and the opinion that others have of him we must never go beyond the intellectual outlook. Sympathy, contempt, or any other reaction to sensitiveness are quite likely to interpose a veil between our vision and the contrast from which humour springs.

And we find that Jane Austen is pitiless in banishing sentiment which she practically always takes for sentimentality.

This complete absence of feeling sometimes makes her humorous scenes rather dry and harsh, and gives them a hardness which suggests the timbre of a voice of very pure tone which lacks the vibration of certain harmonics.

More often than not, however, the very real charm of her light, subtle irony makes one forget that her rapid, brilliant, and realistic pages are not enriched by emotion.

With a cleverness which is almost disturbing in its

naturalness and simplicity the author simply does not allow us to notice that there are vast regions of reality which are never to be explored by her, uncharted tracts for her, of which she knows absolutely nothing but the name.

But we are hardly conscious of this immense gap in her experience and intuition until that moment when we come to examine from our own daily angle of vision the creatures at whom we have laughed with Jane Austen.

Then for the first time it strikes us that the follies, absurdities, and pretensions which have been so ably ridiculed for us have their touching aspect as well.

Whilst reading we feel nothing of the kind, and have been amused (in a slightly different fashion perhaps), but definitely amused, as much by a Mrs. Dashwood as by an inoffensive old thing like Miss Bates, whose chatter surges in floods through the story of Emma.

Only once—and that is in *Persuasion* (there is no other example of the kind)—Jane Austen's want of feeling really shocks us. We are struck by a want of taste and by something worse still. Mrs. Musgrove has just heard the news of her son's death, and is telling Captain Wentworth some insignificant story about "poor Dick," and she is crying bitterly over the loss of her son, whom no one can mourn as she does.

> "Mrs. Musgrove was of a comfortable, substantial size, infinitely more fitted by Nature to express good cheer and good humour than tenderness and sentiment . . . and Captain Wentworth should be allowed some credit for the self-command with which he attended to her large fat sighings over the destiny of a son whom alive nobody had cared for. Personal size and mental sorrow have certainly no necessary proportions. A large bulky figure has as good a right to be in deep affliction as the most graceful set of limbs in the world. But fair or not fair, there are unbecom-

ing conjunctions, which reason will patronise in vain—which taste cannot tolerate—which ridicule will seize."

The " unbecoming conjunction " which strikes us here is not exactly that which the author intended.

That which shocks us in this passage is something which the keenest eye and the most mocking spirit in the world is not always capable of appreciating.

A sincere grief, be it only the grief which is expressed in " large fat sighing," has always something touching, something worthy of respect about it for the majority of us.

This little passage, without which we might have written down Jane Austen's taste as faultless, affords still more useful and important evidence.

As we have seen, Jane Austen's letters tell us little or nothing as to the source of humour in her work.

In that letter where she speaks of the necessity of laughing at herself and others we are given just a bare indication of the psychological origin of her attitude to reality.

The quotation from *Persuasion* is a different sort of revelation, and it is all the more significant from being quite involuntary.

There, by her own confession, we find that " reason " and " taste " are the two fountain-heads of her humour. And these two might be reduced to one, for taste is the product of a rational culture, of a considered adaptation on certain lines which recapitulates a system of logic of the æsthetic as it were.

If the disharmony of such and such a spectacle with the laws of reason or the principles of taste noted by an eminently rational observer is the foundation of that form of irony which we call " humour," amusement is the result.

The author, grasping the nature and scope of such a disharmony very rapidly, regards it as superfluous to demand any such endorsement of us. Believing himself that reason and order preponderated in the world he would regard as an exception anything which deviated in any manner whatsoever from the generally accepted logic.

Thus he would not insult his reader by asking him to pronounce on some humorous scene or other, the opinion which absurdity always excites in a being whose reason is not warped. The only thing he can ask of his reader is association with him, in the pleasure which the spectacle of folly, vanity, or ambition has aroused in him.

But that form of humour which is addressed solely to the intelligence and has no aim but to divert, is not only starved from the human point of view, its field of action is exceedingly restricted, is hemmed in on all sides by vanity, folly, eccentricity, and obsessions, by everything which belongs to the surface of personality, to the outer being, and not so much to the human relations as between man and man, but to the relations between members of one society, one social clan.

However poor in sensibility we may be, reason insists that we shall not remain unmoved by the sight of vice or evil.

In order that some feature of absurdity may make us smile it is necessary that this manifestation of the ridiculous will have no serious consequences, and is merely an isolated and unimportant accident in regard to order and universal logic.

And then, too, the humour which appears on every page of six studies of country life is exercised upon objects with which most humorists would not greatly concern themselves.

It is in the small incidents of quiet monotonous lives, in the exchange of small talk at the manor house, or the parsonage, criticism of the good and bad qualities of friends and neighbours that Jane Austen invariably finds material to exercise her sense of the ridiculous upon.

Her vision of reality is so different from that of her characters that it could not be otherwise. Hence her perpetual creation of the humorous point of view, hence the aura of irony which gives her work, delicate and devoid of bitterness as it is, a distant but indisputable resemblance to that of Swift in *Gulliver's Travels*. Just as Gulliver watched the Lilliputians at work with amusement and took pleasure in seeing a cook pluck a lark, smaller than a fly, and a girl thread a needle with a piece of cotton no less invisible than the needle, Jane Austen listens to Mr. Collins' discourse upon Lady Catherine's graciousness, or the remarks of Mr. Woodhouse on the dangers of eating a slice of wedding-cake.

Lilliputians and denizens of Surrey and Hampshire villages alike, are slow to suspect that their occupations can appear futile and laughable. But as an English critic has justly remarked :—

> " The spectacle of the kingdom of Lilliput had no particular significance until the eye of Gulliver fell on it."

Mr. Collins, Mr. Woodhouse or Miss Bates become humorous types because reality as they conceive it does not correspond in the least with the vision of reality of the author who is observing them. In the eyes of their friends, in their narrow provincial surroundings, they are estimable and lovable beings.

Very few people in Highbury would think of laughing at Miss Bates' flow of chatter, Mrs. Elton's vanity, or Mr. Woodhouse's little obsessions.

Their failings are seen too often and too closely to be striking in their own *milieu*.

When for the cream of society in Highbury it is a question of forming an opinion on a new-comer, everyone followed the line of least resistance, and once it was decided that Mrs. Elton was to be praised, praised she was.

> "The greater part of her new acquaintance, disposed to commend or not in the habit of judging . . . or taking it for granted that the bride must be as clever and agreeable as she professed herself, were very well satisfied, so that Mrs. Elton's praise passed from one mouth to another as it ought to do."

As if to enhance the distinction established by humour between the point of view of the actor and that of the spectator, Jane Austen, while tacitly inviting her readers to the festival of irony which she is enjoying herself, only occasionally allows her more able and reasonable characters to participate in them. Perhaps she fears to disturb the unity of her work by adopting any other method.

Perhaps, too, she knows that in order to depict failings and eccentricities as seen by some people in Highbury who could observe them quite as well as she observed them herself, she would have to endow them with the exaggeration of caricature or the fixity of a grimace.

Thus she rarely allows Elizabeth Bennet or her father to make fun of Mr. Collins, and only once in *Mansfield Park* does she give Henry Crawford the right to exclaim :—

> "Poor Rushworth and his forty-two speeches! Nobody can ever forget them. Poor fellow! I see him now—his toil and his despair! Well, I am much mistaken if his lovely Maria will ever want him to make two-and-forty speeches to her!"

Thus surrounded by an atmosphere of benevolence and affection the most ridiculous beings can give way freely to their folly and yet remain true to life.

In this way the author's irony and realism easily combine in all her humorous passages, even in the interminable harangues of Miss Bates.

Why, indeed, should the old spinster check her flow of gossip when she finds herself always surrounded by a kind and attentive audience ?

Walter Scott and some others after him have often remarked that a Mr. Woodhouse or a Miss Bates at first seem infinitely diverting, but

> " are apt to become as tiresome in fiction as in real society."

Whately was the first to answer to this that " it is no fool that can describe fools well " and that those persons who find Jane Austen's humorous characters tiresome would be obliged to look down equally on *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Midsummer Night's Dream,* since these two comedies of Shakespeare are studies of folly and vanity.

At the same time we should do well to be guarded in our comparisons of the humorous types of Shakespeare with those of Jane Austen. It may be tempting to say with Goldwin Smith

> " The hand which drew Miss Bates, though incapable of creating Lady Macbeth, yet might have given us Mrs. Quickly or the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet.*"

We must not forget that there exists an essential difference between these characters.

In the powerful and subtle imagination of Shakespeare, warmed by the radiant sunshine of his creative genius, fools, knaves, and the feeble-minded participate in life as vividly as the strong of mind and character.

His conception of life, great and all-embracing and

generous as reality, permits the humble sometimes to associate themselves in essential action, and in this association he makes them justify their existence.

Jane Austen, on the contrary, with her limited vision of reality, is obliged to eliminate from the action of her work all beings who do not come up to the restricted standard of intelligence and common sense which she imposes on her characters before giving them the right to activity.

In the *milieu* that she studies, where life is equally far removed from material cares and the irresistible impulses of passion, activity is more or less to be described as a game needing delicate adjustment, reflection, judgment, and an exquisite sense of rhythm and time.

This is why the foolish characters, the Eltons, the Bateses, the Collinses, Harriet Smith, Mrs. Bennet, and Mr. Woodhouse never take action.

They talk, they relate the history of events and comment on them after their own fashion, but they are never allowed to risk action on their own account.

They are kept at the outside edge of the plot, comic drones of a well-ordered little hive, where work is a privilege reserved for those who can make a proper use of it.

To compare such characters to those of Shakespeare is therefore not only useless but dangerous, for the humorous types of Jane Austen could not emerge unscathed from such an ordeal.

The most one can say is that in comparing certain speeches of the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* with the long-winded harangues of Miss Bates, the method of treatment applied to two such different subjects has a decided similarity and produces much the same effect.

No analysis could explain and point out in a more striking manner the inextricable confusion of mind, the total incapacity to follow out a thought, or to co-ordinate or arrange phrases in sequence, than the monologues of Juliet's nurse and the excellent Miss Bates, broken up as they are by parentheses, exclamations, and reflections.

The nurse interrupts a somewhat highly-flavoured anecdote to recall such and such a memory, to confirm a date, and every now and then repeats of her husband, "A' was a merry man."

Miss Bates' conversation is devoted to the subjects which are becoming to a lady in her position, but they pursue the same roundabout way.

Sometimes instead of making a character talk in order that humour may be emanated from the ingenuousness, the verbosity or the unconscious vanity of the speaker, Jane Austen employs a different procedure.

In order to conceal herself better behind one of the puppets whose movements are controlled by her irony, it amuses her now and then to express as her own opinion, the opinion of the people she is bringing us in contact with at the moment. Never is she more successful in "laughing at herself and others," than when she pronounces one of those solemn dicta in which all the lore, wisdom and experience of a provincial neighbourhood, are concentrated.

For anyone who has not a fine ear for subtle resonances the opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* may lack significance :—

> "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."

This is a rapid short cut to full revelation of

the opinions of the Lucases and Bennets on this subject.

In the same way the reflections of the whole county are given us at the beginning of *Mansfield Park*, which describes the settlement in life of Miss Ward and her sisters :—

> " About thirty years ago, Miss Maria Ward, of Huntingdon, with only seven thousand pounds, had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram of Mansfield Park, in the county of Northampton, and to be thereby raised to the rank of a baronet's lady, with all the comforts and consequences of a handsome house and a large income.
>
> " All Huntingdon exclaimed on the greatness of the match, and her uncle, the lawyer himself, allowed her to be at least three thousand pounds short of any equitable claim to it.
>
> " She had two sisters to be benefited by her elevation, and such of their acquaintance as thought Miss Ward and Miss Frances quite as handsome as Miss Maria did not scruple to predict their marrying with almost equal advantage. But there are certainly not so many men of large fortune in the world as there are pretty women to deserve them.
>
> " Miss Ward, at the end of half-a-dozen years, found herself obliged to be attached to the Rev. Mr. Norris, a friend of her brother-in-law, with scarcely any private fortune ; and Miss Frances fared yet worse."

Thanks to the suppleness of her mind which allows her to penetrate into the minds of her characters, and to understand their point of view, her sense of humour always remains moderate, just and delicate.

Instead of the painful impression which an ironical study of weaknesses and foibles might produce in us in the hands of an author studying them from afar and above, Jane Austen provides us with a pleasure quite without bitterness from the spectacle of life.

The characters who are to serve for our diversion and hers are capable of inspiring other than ironical reflections and she knows it.

The aggressive vanity of Mrs. Elton, the flat and heavy foolishness of Mr. Collins are very different in her eyes from the innocent eccentricity of a Miss Bates or a Mr. Woodhouse.

"I hope I may never make fun of goodness or kindness,"

she makes Elizabeth Bennet say. But when a kind old thing possesses, along with her really good qualities, some irresistibly funny ones, is it possible to help laughing at them? If Jane Austen had been asked the reason of her invariably ironic attitude to life, she would, perhaps, have answered that a sense of humour like wit bloweth where it listeth, and that mockery detached from all moral judgment, from all appreciation of spiritual values, always has the right to exercise itself upon anything which reason recognises as opposed to itself.

While most humorists condemn more or less indirectly the errors and failings that they perceive in their fellow-men, she confines herself to stating them, and to indicating in what manner they are removed from truth and reason.

Her humour has also the inestimable power of lighting up the flattest existence, the dullest and most monotonous social conditions, in proportion as it attacks them.

By this light the Highbury drawing-rooms, Mrs. Bennet's twaddle, the rather formal luxury of *Mansfield Park* become interesting, and as long as the agreeable and flattering illusion that she creates lasts, we believe with Jane Austen that in the manifold play of appearances, the thousand and one aspects of folly, vanity and sometimes human malice, are nothing but one scene after another of a comedy ever renewed,

played by indefatigable actors for the diversion of an audience of witty and intelligent spectators.

Though assiduously addicted to purely humorous treatment of her subjects, Jane Austen sometimes gives play to her irony, in parody or satire, and in these cases does not attain to such felicitous effect.

The best parts of *Northanger Abbey* combine the elements of witty parody and satire on the romantic school of fiction, the tragic and stirring peripatetics, which were rapturously enjoyed by readers of Mrs. Radcliffe.

In this work of her early youth, crude and sometimes hesitating, the author is bent on dissipating the romantic mirage created by the hectic imagination of some of the novelists of the day.

Because such stories are a real danger to the " unformed mind of a girl of seventeen " Jane Austen is desirous of pointing out what ridiculous mistakes and pitiful misunderstandings nourishment on such literary fare may lead to.

She therefore wrote *Northanger Abbey,* in which the plot, scenery and setting of the Radcliffe School are reduced to the common level of everyday life.

The falsity, absurdity, ingenuousness and grossness of the methods of these writers is revealed little by little, not only to the reader, who expects this, but also to the heroine.

This young lady, knowing absolutely nothing of life, had hoped to find wise and experienced guidance in the works of Mrs. Radcliffe ; she soon finds out how deeply mistaken she has been and, " her romantic visions flown away for ever," she promises herself to be guided in future by the dictates of common sense.

When she is satirizing romantic fiction Jane Austen is mistress of really great comic power and, if one may say so, of irresistible "punch."

This power and vivacity are all concentrated on the portrayal of the heroine and the sequence of events in which she is involved.

A few words are enough to explain that *Northanger Abbey* is not destined to contain any of those long irrelevant narrations which agreeably diversified the novels then in vogue.

> "Mrs. Thorpe was a widow, and not a very rich one. She was a good-humoured, well-meaning woman, and a very indulgent mother. Her eldest daughter had great personal beauty, and the younger ones . . . did very well. This brief account of the family is intended to supersede the necessity of a long and minute detail from Mrs. Thorpe herself of her past adventures and sufferings, which might otherwise be expected to occupy the three or four following chapters."

But when, on the contrary, it is a question of comparing the conduct of Catherine Morland with that of an Emily or an Adeline we are given more than a "brief account."

Catherine, forgotten by her partner, remains sitting in a corner of the ball-room thinking regretfully of the attractive Mr. Tilney, who seems to have gone home.

> "She not only longed to be dancing, but was likewise aware that as the real dignity of her situation could not be known, she was sharing with scores of other young ladies still sitting down all the discredit of wanting a partner. To be disgraced in the eyes of the world, to wear the appearance of infamy while her heart is all purity . . . is one of those circumstances which peculiarly belongs to the heroine's life, and her fortitude under it what particularly dignifies her character.

"Catherine had fortitude too; she suffered, but no murmur passed her lips.

"From this state of humiliation she was roused at the end of ten minutes to a pleasanter feeling by seeing not Mr. Thorpe, but Mr. Tilney . . . he seemed to be moving that way, but he did not see her, and, therefore, the smile and the blush which his sudden reappearance raised in Catherine passed away without sullying her heroic importance . . . he was talking with interest to a fashionable and pleasing-looking woman, who leant on his arm, and whom Catherine immediately guessed to be his sister . . . thus unthinkingly throwing away a fair opportunity of considering him lost to her for ever by being married already. But guided only by what was simple and probable, it had never entered her head that Mr. Tilney could be married . . . he had never mentioned a wife . . . he had acknowledged a sister. . . . Therefore, instead of turning of a death-like paleness and falling in a fit on Mrs. Allen's bosom, Catherine sat erect, in the perfect use of her senses, and with cheeks only a little redder than usual."

Here the satire is employed to emphasize the difference between a heroine in real life, like Catherine, and one of the personages of Mrs. Radcliffe's melodrama. Romantic fiction suggested other comparisons to Jane Austen.

Reality, as represented in the *Mysteries of Udolpho* and kindred works, does not correspond in the least to life as we know it, and an imagination nourished on terrifying and extraordinary spectacles, which can only be called theatrical in the modern sense of the word, is bound to undergo a series of disillusions in coming into contact with nature and real life.

As she knows nothing of the world outside her home, and derives all her ideas of human nature and her ideals of beauty in Nature from the only novels she has read, Catherine Morland as she approaches Northanger Abbey expects at every turn of the road to see a feudal keep, a grey-walled castle surrounded

by ancestral oaks. The abbey, she thought, would certainly be like those old castles which always appeared to the enraptured eyes of Mrs. Radcliffe's heroines.

> " Bathed in the splendour of the setting sun, whose last radiance gilded the high, narrow Gothic windows."

For a long time beforehand she had been revelling in a delicious shudder of fear, in vague alarm and sombre presentiments, which, in her opinion, were the necessary accompaniments to a prospective visit to an ancient abbey.

But the desired sunset and the expected terrors were replaced by something infinitely less romantic.

Catherine, getting out of the carriage in driving rain, had only one thought, and that was how best to protect her new straw hat from the downpour.

Quite forgetting the dark presentiments proper to a heroine as she crosses the threshold of an ancient dwelling, she stepped into the house without so much as a thought of the scenes of horror which the old walls must have witnessed once upon a time.

There was a strong wind blowing.

Its moans should have conveyed to her some echoes of cries of distress, or some lugubrious warning, but it brought nothing to the travellers but the scud of rain-drops against the window-panes.

Yet Catherine never doubts that she will soon have the delight of taking part in one of those scenes which in Mrs. Radcliffe's works are always staged romantically in an ancient castle or convent.

When after supper the wind increases in violence, Catherine, playing her Radcliffe part, recognises it as the presage of an awful night.

It comes home to her that she is at Northanger *Abbey*, and not in a modern house, in spite of the attentions lavished on her by her hosts, in spite of the lights and

the cheery blaze in a new-fashioned grate, in spite of the well-equipped table and the general luxury which was the Tilney's rule.

The howling of the wind revives her complete faith in her favourite novels.

Was it not always found that ruins, and ancient walls which enclose secrets, are either bathed in moonlight in the hours of tragedy or else instead of that icy, mysterious light they are plunged in impenetrable darkness, through which the roar of the storm and the wail of the wind are heard.

Catherine felt encouraged to do a little research into the history of Northanger ; she began the very first evening to discover the secrets of the house, the traces of crimes already committed in the Abbey.

A large cedar chest, with a silver lock blackened by time, no doubt contained a few jewels, some faded flowers, a portrait ; she lifts the massive lid and sees a carefully-folded cotton counterpane lying at the bottom of the coffer.

She explores the drawers of a lacquer cabinet, expecting hidden papers, perhaps a confession of atrocious crimes written by a murderer whose soul was tortured by tardy remorse ; the yellowed papers are old washing bills.

Gothic castles, shades of night, tempests, worm-eaten chests, indecipherable manuscripts, the *décor* and accessories of fantastic romance are thus presented in entirely opposite parts, turn by turn, first under the conventional aspect which belongs to Mrs. Radcliffe's fiction, then in less picturesque guise, but one which is more faithful to reality.

✶ Jane Austen's satire unmasks every effect, every traditional scene of romance imitated from the *Mysteries of Udolpho.*

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The imagination of the naïve Catherine is constantly brought up short in its wanderings to the regions of chimera and is recalled to common sense.

Here we find, together with the elements of fantastic fiction, the method by which novelists of the Radcliffe school give a semblance of logic and reality to the most improbable events.

After having terrified readers with the prodigies, phantoms, and apparitions, after having created an atmosphere of mystery and substituted the supernatural for the real, Mrs. Radcliffe, in the last chapter of her novel, gives some rational explanation of all her wonders, which she had presented in the first place as surpassing anything which human reason could conceive of or accept.

This refutation of the absurd and unlikely is not so long delayed in Jane Austen's novel, each romantic peripatetic in *Northanger Abbey* in its turn comes to an end on a comic note of disillusion, of ironic contrast between the expectations of an imagination warped by injudicious reading and the things which really happen to most people in this world.

This satire is not limited to exposure of the exaggeration and absurdity which is the substance and form of romantic fiction, it is reinforced by a delicate study of psychology.

Catherine, who is naturally healthy minded in every other way, invariably goes astray whenever she appeals to her favourite fiction for guidance.

She is dying to meet one of those villain-heroes whose adventures fill the pages of *The Italian* or *The Necromancer of the Black Forest.*

In vain the most flattering and courteous homage is lavished on her at Northanger, in vain her host loads her with little attentions, with every consideration,

too many novels have taught her to what depths of villainy human nature can fall.

In the face of all likelihood she persuades herself that General Tilney has been the slayer of the wife whose memory he seems to mourn so deeply.

The General has raised a monument to his dead wife.

Does Catherine see in that a proof of real affection and regret?

No, for she has read that cynicism and dissimulation to that point are by no means rare.

> "She could remember dozens who had persevered in every possible vice going on from crime to crime till a violent death or a religious retirement closed their black career. The erection of the monument itself could not in the smallest degree effect her doubts of Mrs. Tilney's actual decease. Were she even to descend to the family vault where her ashes were supposed to slumber—were she to behold the coffin in which they were said to be enclosed, what could it avail in such a case? Catherine had read too much not to be perfectly aware of the ease with which a waxen figure could be introduced and a suppositious funeral carried on."

When Catherine is forced to admit the outrageousness of her inventions, she turns upon herself sharply. She remembers the frame of mind in which she arrived at Northanger, and understands that her folly springs from the pernicious source of her favourite fiction.

There the satire ends on a rather didactic note. In the last seven chapters of *Northanger Abbey* the author drops irony, and is wholly occupied with the undeserved misfortunes and then the final satisfaction of her heroine's desires.

Northanger Abbey has a place to itself in Jane Austen's achievement, for it is an unequal work, betraying some uncertainty of touch, now a satire, now a comedy of manners.

Some of its value as a satire disappeared with the vogue of Mrs. Radcliffe's romances.

The enduring element in it which does not age is the subtlety of the irony, the vivacious contrast, and the use of comic situation by which the satire is expressed, although the object of it has long since ceased to interest the public.

There is always one point to clear up on the subject of the satirical part of *Northanger Abbey*.

Is it, or is it not, in a certain degree imitation, and was not Jane Austen inspired by a book that she knew very well to write this exposure of the Radcliffe School ?

The illuminating preface written by Mr. Austin Dobson for a fairly recent edition of *Northanger Abbey* informs us that Jane Austen was trying to treat the Radcliffe fiction just as Cervantes treated Montalvo's *Fifth Book*, and Orteza's *Felixmarke*, and just as Mrs. Lennox treated *Cassandra* and *Cleopatra*.

Mr. Austin Dobson fails to add that Jane Austen, who was, no doubt, familiar with the work of Cervantes, also knew and keenly appreciated *The Female Don Quixote*, by Mrs. Charlotte Lennox.

Imitation of Cervantes is only faintly to be traced in *Northanger Abbey*. Jane Austen owes nothing to him but the theme of her satire, and perhaps only borrowed it indirectly.

Catherine's adventures in no way resemble those of the inimitable *Don Quixote*, but follow those of young Arabella, Mrs. Lennox's heroine, rather closely.

The Female Don Quixote had had a transient success which was yet remembered by Jane Austen's contemporaries.

Dr. Johnson had praised it in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1752, and also Fielding in the *Covent Garden Journal*.

Fielding even went so far as to declare that *The Female Don Quixote* surpassed the original who inspired it, in some ways.

Mrs. Lennox's subject seemed to him to be truer to life than that of Cervantes, and Arabella's adventures less fantastic than the excellent knight's.

> "The reading of romances," he declared, "is far more likely to unbalance the judgment of a young lady than that of a mature and upright gentleman."

And so Arabella, who charmed Fielding and Doctor Johnson, was equally admired forty years later at Steventon Rectory.

Jane Austen alludes to *The Female Don Quixote* in a letter written in 1807, pronouncing it, "quite as entertaining as memory represented it." The truth is that this first reading took place at Steventon shortly before Jane Austen began to write her own novel, *Northanger Abbey*. The object of the satire in both books is more or less the same.

Mrs. Lennox is making fun of Mademoiselle de Scudéry, and Jane Austen of Mrs. Radcliffe, and they both have the same aim, to emphasize the contrast between reality and the falsification of it, presented in certain forms of fiction.

Because she only knows life from the pages of *Clelia* and *The Great Cyrus*, Arabella persists in viewing every man she meets as a timid and hesitating lover, and the most insignificant incident as an opportunity for him to declare his passion.

The misfortunes of the illustrious Madame have taught her that the beauty of fair ladies may inspire guilty passions as well as high-souled adorations. And she is not long in discovering in a worthy old uncle symptoms at which her chastity believes itself justified in taking alarm.

She banishes the poor soul from her presence, persuaded that he is unable to set eyes on her without burning with most discreditable flame.

> " Retire," she says, " oh, my unhappy uncle ! and may reason and absence from me restore your peace of mind ! When you have triumphed over the unfortunate sentiments which are the cause of your suffering and my own, rest assured that you will have no cause to complain of my attitude to you."

Where Arabella, reared on the school of Scudéry and La Calprenède, sees lovers and passions wherever she looks, Catherine Morland " supped full " of Radcliffe romance is always discovering the likelihood of abominable crime and diabolical cruelty.

Catherine, like Arabella, is brought back to a common-sense point of view by sheer weight of evidence, and finally comes to appreciate the fact that romantic fiction is not the best school of life for an ingenuous and credulous young person.

However, if Jane Austen *does* owe something to Mrs. Lennox she has only borrowed the most amusing features of an otherwise rather tedious novel, and uses them cleverly and with originality.

Arabella's mishaps pursued through interminable chapters end by wearying us. Those of Catherine Morland last just long enough to make us smile, and break off before they begin to seem forced or boring.

In writing *Northanger Abbey*, which affords the only example of imitation to be found in Jane Austen's work, she is guided as ever by her psychological intuition, and her artistic *flair*.

In this novel her irony is restrained to those limits, which, if passed, make of the satire a case over-stated, which runs serious risks of being quite as absurd as the object of it.

CHAPTER V

VALUE AND SCOPE OF JANE AUSTEN'S WORK

THERE is a moment when the pale pure light of dawn gives an entirely new aspect to a familiar landscape.

In the limpid floods of atmosphere which bathe it then, this landscape has a character which it would be impossible to discover in it under the rays of the midday sun.

Although it is well known to us, the magic of the dawn makes it new ; we see it for the first time. It is such an atmosphere which reveals the work of Jane Austen to us in the same way.

In the three novels which belong to the latter period of a career cut short too soon, and to an equal degree in the pages written by a girl of twenty, an atmosphere of morning freshness, a serene and all-pervading light lends unexpected interest to things and people, never rising above the level of average human life.

The author has no knowledge of anything, and refuses to have knowledge of anything, outside the peaceful security of lives protected from all surprises of destiny, if there be any such lives ; nothing attracts her attention or excites her curiosity which cannot attain to its full growth in the social and intellectual atmosphere of the " gentry."

In spite of these restrictions, perhaps because of

them, her fiction translates for us certain aspects of reality with unequalled lucidity and certainty of touch.

Her work gives example of a singular contradiction ; those confining boundaries which elsewhere would be the cause of weakness and insufficiency, the restricted horizon on which a few meagre figures pine and dwindle without ever reaching their full development, all this, contributes in this case to the harmony of a unique production.

Merely an amused and attentive spectator, Jane Austen does not seek to interpret life, she is content to observe it, but her mind and her sentiments are always in unison with the objects of her observation.

And at the same time we find in her fiction an acceptance of reality which is kindly without being banal, ironical without bitterness.

There is no hint of the disquietude which is the result of the least disharmony between life and the mind which observes it.

How could there be any such element in *Pride and Prejudice* or *Mansfield Park*, since the girl who wrote them knew nothing of life which was not gentle and joyous ? Plot, setting and characters are all produced by direct observation ; Jane Austen found these simple upright souls in her own circle, souls equally removed from the parching deserts of passion and the dangerous summits of ideals ; her own life only reveals to her that it is sweet to be in thraldom to the same quiet routine day after day.

And as she unites a remarkable gift for observation with an incredible indifference to anything outside her material vision, the image of the real which her fiction offers us is both amiable and exceedingly true.

This fidelity of reproduction, however, does not at

first impress us especially, for one of the most precious of Jane Austen's artistic merits is to awaken the same interest in us that we derive from the events of our own daily lives.

Keen as it often is, this interest does not often comprise astonishment or admiration.

As art *is* life, in the pages of Jane Austen, we are not in the least surprised to meet people there whom we know by sight quite well, whose minds are open books to us, like the minds of friends we have known intimately for years.

The invisible film which so often rises between readers and the characters of a novel never separates us from the loiterers who discuss things under the shady trees of Mansfield Park, nor from the visitors in the drawing-room at Longbourne. So complete is the illusion that we only feel a moment of surprise when the author breaks the charm at the last page and abruptly we return from " fiction " to " reality." The powerful and subtle fascination of this fiction brings a new and ingenious solution to the problem of the relations between art and life.

In order to present an imaginative synthesis of reality in expressive concentration, novelists up to that time had admitted into their work, the likely, the possible and the exceptional, as well as truthful representation of what *is*.

Their work acquired remarkable vigour thereby, and stood out in bold relief ; daily life shone out in the brilliant colouring of drama and adventure, and clouds of glory and incense floated at times round certain characters, the clouds of glory which accompany all the movements of heroes and goddesses.

Although inspired largely by reality, novelists added to their work the more exceptional aspects of life.

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In the case of *Pride and Prejudice* the new attitude of the novelist to reality entails a modification of the optics and movement of her work.

A village suffices for the setting, and the plot develops in a few months only.

Not attempting to deal in a masterful manner with time and space, Jane Austen's novel is enclosed in a narrow frame.

The number of characters is no greater than might be found assembled at any country gentleman's dinner-table or in his drawing-room, and the work demands, for patient observation of the characters and detailed study of monotonous existences, the same interest which in other novels is aroused by striking and original personalities or a rapid succession of unexpected events.

Instead of the peripatetics and unlooked-for turns of Fortune's wheel which bring the plots of Fielding, Smollett, and even Richardson to their climaxes, the plots of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* present more delicate devices.

The arrival of a visitor, a meeting at a ball or out walking, a few words overheard by a witness whose presence is not suspected; these are little things, and yet they are big enough to decide the fate of Elizabeth Bennet or Anne Elliot, or to send Henry Crawford back to his empty life of dissipation.

In her delicate, ironical pages Jane Austen fixes something that she perceives, and this is that even the most monotonous life, if solely from the fact that it is lived by man, deserves to be studied, and has no need of embellishment or of transposition to a higher key to be transcribed in a novel.

For the first time life is transposed to art in a novel, without an alteration in the rhythm or the beat of life or in the colours of reality.

The author being a woman of narrow experience,

her work embraces only a small number of characters and situations, but as these are borrowed directly from reality the work which one would imagine too restricted to touch profound truth nevertheless participates in the infinite variety of life.

The same aura, the influence of the same tradition, gives the characters of each novel relationship with those who come before them.

Sir John Middleton, Sir Thomas Bertram, and Mr. Knightley are guided by the same principles in the administration of their estates, their anxiety and aim in life is one and the same—that of transmitting name and property to their heirs intact.

The young clergymen, Mr. Collins, Edmond Bertram, and Henry Tilney, have the same consciousness of the outward obligations of their calling; the heroines, Elizabeth, Emma, and Fanny share the same tastes and have received the education which all daughters of the country gentry received at that period.

But this family resemblance is not carried further, and each squire, parson, and young lady has a marked individuality.

Never assuming or attaining heroic proportions, each one has a life of his own or her own. Like most of the people we meet in everyday life they are not distinguished from the crowd by qualities either strikingly good or strikingly bad, and yet their faces and their characters positively claim our attention because we always see them in the full daylight of reality.

A study of manners as well as of psychology, Jane Austen's work has inevitably undergone some transformation with the passage of years.

In proportion as the manners and customs so faithfully described in her pages have disappeared, each of her novels has become enriched with the touching grace of things passed away for ever.

Her field of study limited, as she said herself, to three or four families in a provincial neighbourhood, her actual production passes beyond these modest limits.

Along with the manners and spirit of a caste, we of to-day discover something of wider scope in her work ; the invariable tendencies and instincts which belong to the soul of a race.

In giving her admirable portrait of Sir Thomas Bertram, Jane Austen does not trouble herself about his genealogy, but we have no doubt on the subject.

The worthy Sir Thomas must count among his ancestors that knight who celebrated his return home from long journeys by a pilgrimage to the tomb of Saint Thomas of Canterbury. The exterior conditions of his life are transformed. The " veray parfit gentil knighte " of Chaucer has become a placid squire, who has never set out on his travels but on one occasion for the purpose of visiting his colonial property.

But after a lapse of four centuries the same qualities, " loyalty, honour, independence, courtesy," remain the qualities by which a gentleman is to be recognised in a social circle where the moral ideal is transmitted quite unchanged and unchangeable from generation to generation.

In the lives of incessant though futile activity of the country gentlefolk of the eighteenth century, in the honest and upright souls strongly attached to reality and order, to peace and material prosperity, we recognise some of the essential characteristics of the English soul when no spirit of adventure, no dream, has given it wings.

In this way, in spite of the narrowness of her field and the uniformity of her design, the fiction of Jane Austen seems to realize that counsel of perfection which Hamlet gave the players at Elsinore : it *is* a mirror held up to nature ; a narrow mirror certainly, but a

mirror which catches a reflection of those eternal verities to which genius is able to give expression in the innumerable forms of art.

The intensely personal and original work of Jane Austen is too closely bound up with a certain conception of reality, too exclusively consecrated to the portrayal of certain social conditions to be one of those human productions which have real fecundity, whose formula may be re-captured, whose tradition may be followed. Few novelists have remained so obstinately enclosed in their own experience as Jane Austen, and none who are as profoundly influenced by their surroundings are less stamped by their period.

And her work, which bears scarcely any trace of literary or spiritual influence—a work isolated in the literary production of the eighteenth century and the dawn of the nineteenth century—contains nothing that one generation transmits to the coming generations as a precious legacy of its sensibility and collective experience.

The first magnificent bursting into blossom of English Romanticism at the opening of the nineteenth century was followed by a deepening and enrichment of sensibility. Thenceforward fiction was no longer limited to study of *mechanism* and the play of reason ; it concerned itself breathlessly and ardently with life.

Novelists and psychologists interested themselves in all manifestations of outward activity as well as in all forms of spiritual life, so that soon, getting beyond a state of egoistic exaltation, their sensibility developed fully as intelligent and generous sympathy. A whole century of moral and material transformation is contained in the few decades which separate Jane Austen from the Victorian novelists.

Charlotte Brontë, Mrs. Gaskell and George Eliot bring a new soul to the study of a new world.

For them—we can see it in their work, and Charlotte Brontë says so frankly in her letters—Jane Austen's work is admirable no doubt, but has not the slightest power of inspiration.

Too many new problems are presented, too many boundless horizons are revealed to the Victorian women writers to allow of their limiting their work to the painting of little " interiors " with " Chinese fidelity."

The smiling tranquillity and perfect serenity of Miss Austen are incomprehensible, almost odious, to Charlotte Brontë, whose work is given up to passion and revolt, whilst the disdainful indifference to social conditions of the poor so freely expressed by the author of *Emma*, alienates equally George Eliot's wide and generous sympathy with sufferings, and Mrs. Gaskell's generally-applied clairvoyance.

Moreover, fiction by women as inaugurated by Miss Burney tended to lose its special character with the advent of the great women writers of the nineteenth century.

Instead of being fiction which concerns itself chiefly with woman's life and judges all things from the feminine point of view, it returns to being fiction which happens to be written by a woman.

Feminine reactions to emotion are to be found on every page, but the authors have leapt over the restrictions which education and social convention imposed upon a " lady " at the end of the eighteenth century.

The social as well as the moral evolution which had taken place stamps the novel written in the middle of the nineteenth century, which is most obviously influenced by Jane Austen, with a new character.

This novel is *Cranford*, one of Mrs. Gaskell's best works, perhaps her masterpiece.

Cranford is related to Jane Austen's work by virtue of its subject as well as its form and its atmosphere.

The women who in the middle of the nineteenth century inhabit the little town which has "fallen into the hands of the Amazons," have as narrow and monotonous an existence, as wholly devoted to useless occupations as the ladies of Highbury; the gentle futility of Miss Matty Jenkins recalls the simplicity of Miss Bates and her inexhaustible flow of chatter.

But there is a capital difference.

We find evidence of a new spirit and of changed conditions in the fact that the *milieu* studied in two novels as closely related as *Emma* and *Cranford* is regarded from an entirely different point of view.

Jane Austen, belonging to the "gentry," makes her studies inside the charmed circle, while Mrs. Gaskell in order to give us a true idea of social values in *Cranford* takes up a pitch outside the ruling society of the little town.

In the eyes of Jane Austen, who fully and joyously accepts the ideal of class isolation, England, which industrialism was modifying and transforming, was a country which it pleased her to know nothing about.

Mrs. Elton, in *Emma*, is a vulgar woman, but could one expect anything else, thinks Emma—here expressing Jane Austen's own thought:—

> "When though part of every winter she had been used to spend in Bath, Bristol was her home, the very heart of Bristol."

The existence of the commercial towns which offends cherished prejudices of the gentry in 1815 has, on the contrary, become in 1853 one of the great realities of national and social life.

Drumble, the great business centre from which Miss Jenkins's young visitor comes, is mentioned with an astonishment in which there is no longer a hint of the

disdain which Birmingham or Bristol inspired in the denizens of Highbury.

The feminine life, narrowly confined to the circle of a little town or parish, which is presented to us in the most attractive colours by Jane Austen, for Mrs. Gaskell is invested with all the gloom of disused things.

In a few decades the great change which had taken place in the national activity had transformed in a subtler though no less radical fashion lives which might have been considered proof against the attacks of the modern spirit.

Instead of the radiant youth of Elizabeth Bennet or Emma Woodhouse, *Cranford* only contains studies of late middle age and the decline of life.

Miss Matty and Miss Jenkins are growing old, as the heroines of Jane Austen would grow old if one could even imagine that age could lay a destroyer's hand on their grace and incomparable freshness.

The Cranford ladies are stranded in the new world which lies about them, seeing and feeling only the old things, absorbed in visions of a vanished past, and the author evidently feels and makes us share a certain pity for these gentlewomen of the *ancien régime*, who live as strangers in their native land.

That is why, though in reading *Cranford* one feels Jane Austen's influence on every page, analysis can only bring differences to light and emphasise the divergences which separate novels of 1853 from novels of 1815.

Besides, Mrs. Gaskell is also the author of novels which deal with social problems, *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, where the serene and cheerful note of *Cranford* changes to a great seriousness, a great indignation, in the face of the social evil which she examines with pitiless clear-sightedness.

After *Cranford*, the tradition of exclusively feminine

romance is carried on by Miss Yonge, but this writer does not borrow from Jane Austen's treatment of humour or feminine psychology, the only resemblance of her work to Jane Austen's lies in the setting, that of family life among gentlefolk.

Here, too, the breath of the modern spirit gives a fresh point of view to Miss Yonge's fiction.

If we may say that *Cranford* reminds us of *Emma*, or, rather, takes up the tale of provincial life after an interval of forty years, adding the elements brought in by social evolution, the work of Miss Yonge, particularly the *Heir of Redclyffe* and *The Daisy Chain*, are directly inspired by *Mansfield Park*.

Miss Yonge's novels bear resemblance to *Mansfield Park* through the nature of their study of love, which more often than not is quite indistinguishable from friendship, by the delicacy and exactitude with which the bonds of family affection are presented and by the acute sense which they express of the importance of gentlepeople in English society.

In every way these novels are less clear-cut, precise, and subtle than Jane Austen's; of her charm, her smile, her invincible humour there is no trace.

The whole of Miss Yonge's work is impregnated with a moralising and preaching tendency which gives to the sage discourse of Edmond Bertram in *Mansfield Park*, the air of having been borrowed from the homilies of an Anglican sermon book.

We have already noted that these passages in *Mansfield Park* are an exception in the work of a perfect artist, far removed from any didactic intention or wish to edify.

It is to these few pages of Jane Austen that Miss Yonge's novels of family life may be compared. But in *Mansfield Park* we are compensated for the sententious reflections of Edmond Bertram by the spirit

and humour with which the author brings her other characters on the scene.

It is far otherwise in the *Heir of Redclyffe*, where the whole conception is merged in an atmosphere thick with the most touching, the most admirable, the most wearisome virtue.

The Puritan ideal as well as the social ideal of a "gentleman" and "lady" of that day find complete expression in the persons and lives of Miss Yonge's heroes and heroines.

Benevolent and affable young squires, rich and well-born young ladies who, after having led the villagers in the way they should go to the requisite degree of piety, end by marrying a missionary and flying off to preach the Gospel and the English virtues to natives of the South Seas, all alike are too weighted with perfection to allow us ever to consider them as real beings.

Miss Yonge is certainly trying to depict English life and the social order of the "gentry," but in her fiction there is neither the exquisite art, nor the sense of reality, nor the psychological power of Jane Austen's.

As, during the course of the Victorian era and under the influence of the Oxford Movement, there was a fervent revival of religious feeling among the middle and upper classes, Miss Yonge replaces the rational outlook which gives so much incisiveness to the study of life in Mansfield and Highbury by a vague sentimentality, a piety which is insipid though evidently extraordinarily sincere.

The rather hard clarity of Jane Austen, her cutting perspicuity, in Miss Yonge's work becomes a soft, diffused light.

And we notice that, where in 1815 the gentry regard the poor and unfortunate as inferiors, there is always a protective charity in the souls of Miss Yonge's heroes, a generosity which is soft-hearted, while at the

same time it keeps at a suitable distance everyone living in the capacity of tenants, servants, or labourers on the Squire's estates.

Thus we see that Jane Austen's influence is only to be found in the outer form of the more modern work.

The framework is appreciably the same one in *Mansfield Park* and the *Heir of Redclyffe*, but much water has flowed under the bridge since the writing of the former, and, in the later study of family life, colour and atmosphere are changed.

It is rare to meet with contemporary criticism of a work which is just enough to be regarded as final, it is still more rare to find an author who receives during his life and continues to receive during that life after death, which he owes to his work, the only plaudits that he really cares to receive.

By a happy exception it seems that the unexpected blows of fate, the bad luck of her literary life, spent its entire force in that unfruitful period of waiting which divides the appearance of *Pride and Prejudice* from that of *Sense and Sensibility*.

Between 1797 and 1811 Jane Austen was no doubt often tempted to think, in those hours of painful self-examination which every intelligent being knows well, that the time she had spent in writing three novels would have been better employed in doing any kind of needlework, but from 1811 success began to come in its most desirable form to one who set particular store by her position as a woman of the world.

Appreciated by a small, select public, receiving evidences of sincere though judicious admiration, understood and delighted in by the very society which had furnished the subject of her work and to whom it was addressed, Jane Austen tasted during the last years

of her life a success which was more precious to her than a blaze of glory and fame.

Since, and especially during the second half of the nineteenth century, Jane Austen's reputation has grown steadily in importance. It cannot be denied, however, that one fact is the same for posterity as it was for her contemporaries: *Pride and Prejudice, Emma,* and *Mansfield Park* are works which are only appreciated, and highly appreciated, by a certain public.

In order to seize the subtle charm which emanates from these novels it is obligatory to approach them with more than the watchful attention that one brings to the study of a work of art, more than the sympathy and intelligence necessary for the appreciation of certain forms of humour.

We must, for the space of a moment at any rate, accept a vision of society and life which many people would dismiss as narrow and egoistic.

The unshakable assurance of Jane Austen in expressing her approval of the life and social conditions which she paints, her implicit refusal to consider any class but her own worthy of attention, her scorn of anything in the regions of sentiment or outward events which goes further than the medium, the average, the lukewarm, are bound to estrange her from readers who demand from novels power and passion, whose fires are struck from *revolt:* revolt of the heart and mind.

The work of an author who seeks to give lasting form to certain aspects of reality which she loves and observes with unresting attention, it is most appreciated to-day, as it was a century ago, by those who regard life with a friendly eye and are able to take the full pleasure from the passing hour, without putting one of those questions which express the anguish and eternal disquietude of the human heart.

CHAPTER VI

PORTRAITS OF THE "GENTRY"

IN order to express their conception of the universe on canvas the Italian Old Masters often adopted the ingenuous expedient of dividing the picture into three parts: at the top is Heaven, with God and His angels; at the bottom, Hell with torments and lost souls; whilst in the middle between them, like a sort of Purgatory, the terrestrial globe is depicted with its deceptive appearances and fleeting pleasures.

Thus making an involuntary admission of the relative importance of the three regions, to their minds, the painters, who were really chiefly concerned with reality, devoted by far the larger of the three surfaces to the midmost region in comparison with that reserved for the blessed, or terrific, visions of the empyrean, or of hell.

One cannot help thinking of such a division, arbitrary, no doubt, but corresponding closely to a certain view of the world and life, when studying the manner in which Jane Austen has seen and interpreted the life of her time. The "gentry," that class which is essentially proper to English society, holding to the aristocracy as well to the middle class, and forming a link between them, is not only the class which Jane Austen knows best, it is also the only class that she wishes to know.

For her the "gentry" are at the centre of the universe. Above them the aristocracy occupy a sort

of empyrean, whose spheres she does not wish to explore.

Below she knows (while ignoring it) that there exists a whole region inhabited by the common folk, servants, farmers and peasants. Her gaze makes no effort to reach beyond the station in which she lives herself. She is content to observe minutely whatever she is able to study at her leisure, every day and at any hour.

She never strays outside the familiar regions of the "gentry's" estates; no curiosity urges her to overstep the limits which in that England of the eighteenth century, when society was enclosed in a rigid frame, isolated one class from another, and, in isolating them, protected them against all intrusion from elements foreign to their nature.

This indifference of Jane Austen to anything outside her world and station in life is not solely the result of idiosyncrasy.

At the date when she wrote, differences of class and of caste were sharply enough defined to make them almost insuperable obstacles, except to the very bold, the very ambitious. But such people—for reasons which we shall advance—are rare among the "gentry."

In Jane Austen's work one meets with well-bred people, with people who are less so, but rarely with the climber who has "arrived." The moderately comic element of *Pride and Prejudice* provides no character like the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*.

All the same a distinction is made between the "landed gentry" (titled landowners who have been possessors of the same properties for generations) and the "gentry" themselves, made up for the most part of well-born people, amongst whom, however, certain self-made men are to be met with, sons of fathers who have made fortunes in trade, who are able to cut a

good figure among the county families, living not upon hereditary fortunes but money recently acquired in towns like Bristol and London.

At the time when Jane Austen began to write, the industrial development of England during the last years of the eighteenth century had rendered more frequent the appearance of the "new rich" in country circles.

But as there can be no rapid transition from one class to another, and as it takes at least one generation of better circumstances to admit a family of middle class to the "gentry," there was no clear-cut distinction between the new comer and the man of ancient descent as far as outward appearance went; there was no outer characteristic to remind anyone of the climber's "humble birth."

They had received the same education, they shared the same opinions and the same prejudices. Mr. Bingley,

> "Whose father had intended to purchase an estate, and had died before he could carry out the project,"

is only inferior to Mr. Darcy in not possessing the advantage of being related to the best families of the realm.

Bingley is no parvenu, and introduces nothing entirely foreign to Darcy's class or out of harmony with its traditions.

On the other hand, the "gentry" draws from its lively sense of its own importance the desire to isolate itself jealously.

The man who is called a gentleman, if he is worthy of the name has no wish for a finer one.

For the English aristocracy, though it can bestow higher titles, has not one that is greater. A gentleman, the daughter of a gentleman, find enough to be proud of in that fact even to the point of not wishing to rise

in rank, or to mix in a circle socially called "above" their own.

> "If you were sensible of your own good you would not wish to quit the sphere in which you have been brought up,"

said Lady Catherine de Burgh to Elizabeth Bennet, trying to persuade the young girl to refuse the hand of Darcy. Elizabeth answers proudly:—

> "In marrying your nephew I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman. I am a gentleman's daughter. So far we are equal."

The England of Jane Austen still had social equilibrium. The formidable thrust-up of the populace to the middle classes, and of the middle classes to the upper classes, was not felt until the opening of the nineteenth century.

The spirit of the preceding century continued to regulate society as a whole, and though chronologically half Jane Austen's work dates from the second decade of the nineteenth century, the society which she portrays is that of the *ancien régime*. For it is important to repeat here that the arbitrary divisions established by the numerical designation of centuries do not correspond in the least to the differences in manners, and customs, and intellectual point of view, in everything which concerns the advancing civilisation of society.

One epoch extends beyond the time which has given it its name, and another is finished and done with before it has numbered more than ten years.

To quote the judicious observation of Sir Walter Besant:—

> "There were so few changes, and these so slight in manners, customs and prevalent ideas between 1700 and 1837, that we may consider the eighteenth century as continuing down to the beginning of the Victorian era."*

* Sir Walter Besant. *London in the Eighteenth Century.*

This prolongation is particularly to be observed in the habit of life of the " gentry," a class which is self-contained above all, constitutes a small world of its own and only receives outside influences tardily and with extreme difficulty.

Living on his own estates, which he leaves less often than ever since the Napoleonic wars isolated England and necessitated the abandonment of the " grand tour " as the finishing touch of a young gentleman's education, a squire or baronet contents himself with the society of his equals.

He hunts or shoots with them according to the time of year, and dines with them whenever he is invited.

He is only perfectly at his ease in their society. He would rarely be wealthy enough to make much of a splash in London, except for a few days' visit every year.

He prefers to stay in the country, and to meet his compeers who reign as masters over this or that slice of the county, and can give him no cause for envy.

Following the squire's example, his wife and children accustom themselves to country life. It is in the manor house and upon the family estate that they find their dearest occupations and favourite amusements.

Lady Bertram, under pretext of ill-health, but really from indolence, gives up accompanying her husband to London every year, and lets him go alone when he goes up for the Parliamentary session.

Lady Middleton, who wishes to be taken for a woman of fashion, arrives in London at the end of January, and stays there as long as her husband, Sir John Middleton, will consent to be exiled from Barton Park and his kennels and stables.

But examples such as these are the exception. Emma Woodhouse has never travelled, and has never seen the sea, and the Misses Bennet have only been

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away from Longbourne to see friends in neighbouring counties.

The terrestrial horizon of the "gentry" was then limited, but the mental horizon was more so.

There was not a quiver in the atmosphere, not a storm in the sky.

Perfect tranquillity, the slightly sanctimonious contentment of the present, the secure outlook of the future, engendered an inconceivable torpor, an ingenuous egoism which exposed itself without shame, since it considered its existence perfectly justified.

Like bees in the hive, which is their universe, where each individual bee buzzes over his task convinced that "all's right with the world" if all is right with the hive, the gentlefolk of Mansfield, the ladies and hostesses of Kellynch Hall, Hartfield, or Barton, have no suspicions as to the existence of universal happiness and harmony, since their own lives furnish evident proofs of it.

Their ear is not finely enough adjusted to hear the voice of humanity, were it only as a distant echo—"the still small voice of humanity." It seems as though human travail and sorrow were arrested on the threshold of their domains like poachers or thieves, by the walls of their parks and the vigilance of their gamekeepers.

And it is a fact that equilibrium in the material life of this class had been maintained so long, as it was also in the education which definitely adapted its members to their surroundings, that irreparable catastrophes or unforeseen disasters were hardly ever known to occur.

It is a great occurrence when the even course of family life is interrupted sometimes by an illness, like that of Marianne Dashwood, by Lydia Bennet's elopement, or the flight of the haughty Maria Bertram.

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And since life is so sweet and untroubled what was the use of seeking satisfactions of ambition and vanity beyond those which naturally come to well-born people as their destiny ?

The absence of all desire for or conception of a more enviable lot, as well as a very real respect for their own dignity, thus prevented the squire or his lady from seeking the society of titled people, members of that upper class which constitutes the highest stratum of the aristocracy, peers of the realm with hereditary rights in Parliament to a voice in the government of the whole nation, such as the squires from generation to generation exercise over the labourers and farmers on their estates.

The "gentry," setting an example of so much independence of the aristocrats, even to the point of indifference to them, it followed that the self-made men received among the "gentry" were obliged to take the same line.

Thus, Mrs. Elton, who as a clergyman's wife is admitted to the best society of Highbury, concentrates all the force of her pretensions in demonstrating to the world at large that her origin in life though not superior to her husband's is equal to it.

All her boasting is to one end, to show that Miss Augusta Hawkins, daughter of a Bristol merchant, and sister-in-law of a gentleman who is so rich "that he has no less than two carriages," is in every point the equal of Miss Emma Woodhouse.

This result once attained, Mrs. Elton having obtained the "freedom" of Highbury drawing-rooms does not seek to rise higher.

To rise from the shopkeeping class, and that of men who have made money in trade, to the county families, is enough to satisfy even a Mrs. Elton.

The "snob" who really cares about knowing titled

people, and will commit meanesses to get into their set, and will endure any humiliations rather than forego this hard-earned privilege, is the exception in the society which Jane Austen depicts.*

It was not until twenty years later, at the opening of a reign which brought with it the triumph of middle-class minds, that the "snob" became a type common enough to be studied in all its aspects by Thackeray in his famous *Book of Snobs.*

At the same time, in Mr. Collins and Sir Walter Elliot, we find inklings of that vapid adulation of the aristocracy which is the distinguishing mark of the English snob. Mr. Collins will speak with deepest veneration of the "condescension" of Lady Catherine de Burgh because that noble lady has advised him without his having asked for advice, to choose a girl of good family for his wife.

> "Choose a gentlewoman for *my* sake and your *own.* Let her be an active, useful sort of person, not brought up high but able to make a small income go a good way . . . bring her to Hunsford and I will visit her."

Sir Walter Elliot, proud as he is of his title of baronet, professes a touching respect for everyone who is happy enough to belong to a higher rank.

In order to renew acquaintanceship with a distant relation, Viscountess Dalrymple, he writes a long letter full of flattery, and when in return Lady Dalrymple leaves her cards and those of her daughter, the Hon. Frances Carteret, he lays their cards where they will be noticed, and talks about his noble cousins to all his visitors.

What are these noble ladies outside the glamour of their position?

The glance which Jane Austen casts in passing upon the aristocracy is disdainful and often mocking, and cannot be called unbiassed.

* *See* Tom Musgrove in *The Watsons*, R. B. J.

Lady Catherine is made to put "the most solemn impertinence" into her every question; Lady Dalrymple has won the reputation of a very charming woman because she has a smile and a commonplace formal courtesy for everyone she comes across.

Her daughter is so ugly and so gauche that she would be welcome nowhere but for her birth and her fortune.

Only the oddities and the ridiculous aspects of a class which Jane Austen could only observe occasionally and from a distance are thought worthy of notice by her.

In a few scornful phrases, she makes it understood that foolishness and bad manners are the same things when found among aristocrats as in any other stratum of society; and then she returns to the study of more familiar figures, whose amusements, thoughts and occupations are well-known to her.

The same reason causes her to neglect almost entirely in her novels the whole of the lower classes. For her—and she never belies herself in her attitude to the humble and the servant-class—there exists in the world a number of people who are born to be poor, badly-fed and in thraldom to all tasks too base and too rough for those persons of superior clay, of which the "gentry" and the aristocracy are composed.

These people have their position and their duties, and must stick to them.

They form part of the existence of well-born people, for do not they procure them comfort and leisure, which are necessary appanages of the upper classes? But it would be superfluous surely to linger over commiseration of their trials. It would be making ourselves sad quite uselessly.

For this reason the heroines of Jane Austen hardly ever leave the paths and drives of their parks, and are rarely to be found in a cottage.

They are unacquainted with members of the working-

classes, except for the numerous servants of their family, and even these are considered more or less as automatons, destined to make this gesture or that, and then to return to their immobility and their nothingness.

A phrase in *Sense and Sensibility* is significant, and especially so because it is perfectly sincere. The author makes us listeners to a conversation between Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters, during which Thomas, the footman, so far forgets himself as to offer a piece of information for which he has not been asked. This little scene of family life ends with these words :—

> "Thomas and the tablecloth, for the moment both equally superfluous, disappeared from the dining-room soon afterwards."

Throughout the whole series of the novels there is not one passage in which the possibility of any other attitude is contemplated for a minute.

The opinion of the servants' hall, coupled with that of the drawing-room, is expressed in that passage from *Mansfield Park*, when the cross-grained Mrs. Norris tries to make out that a message brought by a servant for her pretty niece, Fanny Price, is really for herself.

Sir Thomas Bertram desires Miss Price to come and speak to him at once in his study. Really he is sending for her to listen to the proposal of a suitor, of whom Sir Thomas is strongly in favour.

When the message is delivered to Fanny, Mrs. Norris cries out :—

> "It is for me, and I will go at once. I am concerned in this matter, Baddeley ; there's no doubt of it ! It is for me that Sir Thomas is asking and not for Miss Price."

The well-trained servant cannot subdue his appreciation of the ridiculous side of the question from his point of view. Baddeley is not to be persuaded

"'No, madam; it is Miss Price; I am quite sure it is Miss Price,' and he repeated his words with the ghost of a smile which meant: It is certainly not for you that anyone is sighing."

The narrow limits of society's field of observation, the distant and hostile attitude of well-born people towards everything outside their class, is also very clearly brought out in *Emma*.

When Emma Woodhouse is dissuading Harriett Smith from accepting a young farmer of the neighbourhood as her husband, Miss Woodhouse gives a thorough explanation of the social code which makes the union undesirable.

She has already declared that:—

"A young farmer, either on foot or on horseback, is the last person who could rouse my curiosity,"

and that a man of that station, on account both of his free and easy manner and his low birth, is at once too independent and too inferior ever to gain the notice of a Miss Woodhouse, who would not do him the honour of perceiving his existence even. When, in a well-expressed letter, the young farmer confesses his passion to Harriett, Emma warns the young woman of the consequences which this marriage would entail:—

"While you were at all in suspense I kept my feelings to myself, but now that you are so completely decided I have no hesitation in approving . . . it would have grieved me to lose your acquaintance, which must have been the consequence of your marrying Mr. Martin . . . it would have been the loss of a friend to me. I could not have visited Mrs. Robert Martin, of Abbey Mill Farm. Now I am secure of you for ever."

The "gentry" form a world which is self-sufficing, but it comprises many different types.

Each one is an individual, but now and then is found to be bound up with one of those types in which the English soul has been incarnate for all time. Nowhere

do we find the part played by the father in family rule so important as in English society, with its hierarchy which lingers on to this day, in spite of the bursting from the bud of a new spirit.

This is especially true in the upper classes, where he is not only the head of the family, but possessor of the name and property. Thus he wields the sort of power that a King might exercise over well-beloved subjects.

In *Mansfield Park*, the only one of Jane Austen's novels in which the father makes a point of honour of exercising his power, we see everything give way before him.

The estate passing as a matter of course by law from eldest son to eldest son, Sir Thomas's greatest anxiety is the future of his other children. He wants his second son, Edmond, to take a place in the world which befits a younger son of good family.

In order to compensate a little for the injustice of the law which accords nothing to the younger children while the first-born have the title and property, he destines Edmond for the Church.

The young man would be able to take advantage of the various livings in the gift of the owner of Mansfield Park.

In marrying his eldest daughter, Sir Thomas appreciates both the advantages which would accrue to Maria by the alliance and those to be gained by the whole family by increasing the scope of its influence.

In a word, he lives as the head of the clan, and endeavours to further the interests of the whole family and of each member of it separately.

But such a personage, so deeply imbued with his responsibilities, is the exception in novels as in life.

Too often the head of the family is more keen on enjoying his advantages than in fulfilling his responsibilities.

In that case the whole family suffers.

Its dignity is diminished and sometimes its property is endangered.

Fathers who are egoists, or incapable, or extravagant, are guilty towards society as well as to their nearest and dearest, and Jane Austen has many times emphasised their weaknesses by her sardonic comment.

Mr. Bennet, whose caustic intelligence and gift of penetration have long ago taken the measure of his wife's vanity and folly, fails to make his authority felt.

Quite disillusioned, and having the indolence which that state brings to many, he makes no effort to protect his daughter Lydia and assure her an honourable marriage.

But for the fortunate intervention of a stranger, his indifference would have permitted the ruin of one daughter and unhappiness for all. Mr. Woodhouse, with as little spirit as health, though courteous to a fault, is neither a friend nor a guide to Emma.

He is simply an elderly baby, whose whims and harmless obsessions have to be put up with.

It is through her father's fault that Emma, who has grown up almost entirely without moral guidance, decidedly lacks judgment and believes that high spirit and the qualities of brilliance are enough for the direction of her own life and that of other people.

Sir Walter Elliot, with his elegant figure and his pretentious manners, is at once incapable and a spendthrift.

> " Vanity was the beginning and end of Sir Walter Elliot's character—vanity of person and of situation. He had been remarkably handsome in his youth, and at fifty-four was still a very fine man. Few women could think more of their personal appearance than he did, nor could the valet of any new-made lord be more delighted with the place he held in society. He considered the blessing of beauty as inferior only to the blessing of a baronetcy ; and Sir Walter

Elliot, who united those gifts, was the constant object of his warmest respect and devotion."

Wishing to keep up his position, Sir Walter gets into debt, and finally is obliged to let his ancestral home and to settle down on a more modest scale at Bath. But as his name—and no doubt also his good looks and fashionable appearance—enable him to take an excellent place in the society of the celebrated watering-place, Sir Walter does not spend much time in regretting the splendours of Kellynch.

The only thing he has to say against Bath is in deploring :—

"The number of ugly women that one meets in the streets there."

And even this bitterness has a compensating sweetness, for if the women of Bath are ugly, what shall be said of the men ? They are even worse.

"Such scarecrows as the streets were full of ! It was evident how little the women were used to the sight of anything tolerable by the effect which a man of decent appearance produced. He had never walked anywhere arm in arm with Colonel Wallis (who was a fine military figure, though sandy-haired) without observing that every woman's eye was upon him ; every woman's eye was sure to be upon him, Colonel Wallis. Modest Sir Walter ! He was not allowed to escape, however. His daughter and Mrs. Clay united in hinting that Colonel Wallis's companion might have as good a figure as Colonel Wallis, and was certainly not sandy-haired."

The baronet's paternal solicitude is only displayed towards his second daughter on one sole memorable occasion. Once when she returns from a visit to the seaside, he congratulates her on her improved appearance, above all on the remarkable freshness of her complexion. Then he asks her in the most serious manner what lotion she used for it ?

Among a squire's or landowner's privileges sport, of course, ranked as the highest.

The solemn Sir Thomas Bertram, on his return to England, almost forgets his ill-temper at finding his house full of strangers when his son informs him that the game has been duly respected.

> "I have hardly taken out a gun since the 3rd. . . The first day I went over Mansfield Wood, and Edmond took the copses beyond Easton, and we brought home six brace between us, and might each have killed six times as many; but we respect your pheasants, sir, I assure you, as much as you could desire. I do not think you will find your woods by any means worse-stocked than they were."

After a morning's hunting or shooting a country gentleman would go home, and tell the histories of his adventures, mishaps and successes to the rest of the family.

If his mental outlook were rather limited (which was often the case), he would not doubt for an instant that his family listened with the same keen pleasure that he experienced in relating.

He never suspected how little attraction the eternal repetition of hunting and shooting stories had for female ears.

> "Maria, with only Mr. Rushworth to attend her, and doomed to repeated details of his day's sport, good or bad, his boast of his dogs, his jealousy of his neighbours, his doubts of their qualification, and his zeal after poachers—subjects which will not find their way to female feelings without some talent on one side or some attachment on the other—had missed Mr. Crawford grievously."

For these men bent on an active life in the open air, often almost incapable of sustained thought, but of indefatigable physical activity, sport is not only the greatest pleasure, it is also the most serious occupation in life.

Sir John Middleton is expressed in the one word "sportsman."

As he is quite uncultured, and moves little in any

but country society, he cannot conceive of any other distinction or ambition for a man than to excel in sport—in all sports.

A good shot, according to him, could not fail to be an upright man, and a perfect gentleman. When Sir John hears of Willoughby's conduct to Marianne Dashwood, he cannot believe in the perfidy of a young man who is probably the most daring horseman in England and to whom he offered one of the pups of his bitch Folly at their last meeting.

Rushworths and Middletons are, however, not the only types in county society. Mr. Knightley, of Donwell Abbey, spends whole mornings in verifying his agent's accounts ; sport is not his principal occupation ; but his labours over the accounts were perhaps unnecessary ; his land would be as well farmed and his rents as punctually paid even if he did not superintend it all himself.

Farmers, labourers and tenants on his property are well aware that they exist in the world to be of service to the squire in particular and to "their betters" in general, the latter having nothing to do but to enjoy the leisure and tranquillity which is theirs by right of birth.

In the agricultural England of the southern counties, which even at this time of day have not been submerged by industrialism and modern hustle, the life of squires at the beginning of the nineteenth century was not liable to material stress or intellectual preoccupation. Only an original or eccentric, like Mr. Bennet, would shut himself into his study to read his favourite authors —humorists no doubt. It needed a man who was rather struck by his own importance to read or encourage his family to read "the works of great authors," for he considered that it befitted well-born people to be familiar with the best of English literature.

Jane Austen's work does not deny all possibility

that any interests but the care of his property and the pursuit of sport could exist for a landowner on his estates, but she does not give us any examples.

But we may see clearly that all the gross language, drunkenness and noisy mirth, and frankly-confessed ignorance, of a Squire Western is banished from this smooth existence. Jane Austen's silence on this point has an importance equal to the affirmation of it in the work of Miss Edgeworth, her contemporary.

The one explains in a passage of her famous *Absentee* what the other leaves us to guess.

> "The education, character and tastes of Mr. Berryl were those which suited his position in society, that of a country gentleman. I do not mean one of the squires of the old school, who are hardly to be met with nowadays, who were quite uneducated, and could do nothing but eat, drink, hunt and shoot. I am speaking of those country gentlemen who are cultivated men, both enlightened and independent, and are worthy of being called the happiest beings who ever inhabited the globe."

Sir Thomas Bertram belongs to this company, also the Musgroves in *Persuasion*, Mr. Knightley and Mr. Bennet.

If we were ever allowed to hear a conversation between men by themselves in the novels we should know more about the lives of the squires of the period.

But, as has often been remarked, Jane Austen's work does not give us one such conversation.

The author only gives us what she or any one of her heroines could be aware of from their narrow personal experience of men's lives, with no intuitional gift in this direction.

If, beyond the park palings and the boundaries of the property, there exists a wider and more complex world where less favoured men than the landowners work for money or fame, where even a Sir Thomas Bertram undertakes the duties of a member of the House of

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Commons, Jane Austen gives no hint of it within the scope of any novel.

What is more, the existence of such a world is almost ignored, and its influence does not trouble the calm of these manor-houses, hidden in the depths of woods hundreds of years old.

We are only shown a glimpse of Mr. John Knightley, in *Emma*, a clever barrister, carrying on his profession in London, whilst his elder brother rules over the family estate. Built to give shelter to the leisure and aristocratic isolation of a privileged class, these old houses would not tolerate under their roofs any anxiety in regard to material prosperity, or any other occupations than the pleasures of sport and hospitality may afford.

Wealth, satisfied and sure of itself, pride which cannot bear the humiliation even of seeing anything inferior to its standard of perfection, have created inviolable fortresses in the hereditary family seats like Mansfield Park, Kellynch Hall, or the sumptuous Pemberley House, of which a whole page of *Pride and Prejudice* acclaims the beauty.

> "The park was very large, and contained a great variety of ground. They entered at one of the lowest points, and drove on for some time through a beautiful wood stretching over a wide extent. . . . They gradually ascended for half a mile, and then found themselves at the top of a considerable eminence, where the wood ceased, and the eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House, situated on the opposite side of the valley, into which the road with some abruptness wound. It was a large handsome stone building, standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of woody hills, and in front a stream of some natural importance was swelled into a greater, but without any artificial appearance. . . . Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place for which Nature had done more or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by awkward taste."

One example of escape to a sphere of activity less

egoistic than the country estate is shown us in naval life. Young naval officers on leave appear in the novels, coming fresh from hard campaigns and bringing to these provincial centres a strong salt breath of adventure, the vision of danger and heroism, the idea of a strenuous life of constant menace in which courage and intelligence get the spur.

Isolated from the Continent by the European wars and the blockade, England was turned in upon herself during the first years of the nineteenth century. Though there were *émigrés* in plenty in London, few had penetrated into the counties, and the spirit of the provinces, always hostile to foreign influence, was at this moment more intransigent than ever, more than ever frankly rebellious to the penetration of elements from without.

During those years when England was separated from the rest of the world and alone resisted "that upstart" called Napoleon, the "gentry" were not conscious of menace.

After Trafalgar, the danger of a French invasion being over, the counties, secure in almost universal Toryism, enjoyed the calm which they alone could have enjoyed in the midst of the hurricane which was sweeping over Europe, as if they formed the motionless centre of a cyclone. There was not a Sir Thomas Bertram in the land who could believe for a moment that the torch of revolution would ever set alight to his coachman's wig.

If Doctor Grant feared anything at all, he feared that there might not be a fine, fat, tender goose for dinner, and not that the Goddess of Reason would ever be enthroned upon his Communion Table or would drive him out of his living,

With their stories of war and prize ships, the young naval officers on leave brought ideas of combat and adventure which the tranquil squires either forgot at

once or belittled by comparing them to the risks and fatigue of a day's sport. Compared to a country gentleman, whose knowledge of travel consisted in two journeys to London a year in a postchaise, the naval man, whatever his age, had an experience of men, cities and things which made a Ulysses of him in the counties; and, looked upon as Ulysses, was so regarded by the peasants of Thrace.

As a matter of fact, this kind of superiority is augmented by the moral worth of a man who can submit himself to strict discipline, and therefore makes himself entitled to command.

Fanny Price's brother has already, at the age of eighteen, made voyages in the Mediterranean and West Indian seas. He has little to learn of the dangers of seafaring or war. At the bidding of the majestic Sir Thomas Bertram, he gives some account of one or two of his adventures quite simply. Listening to him, Henry Crawford feels an admiration not unmixed with regret. Before the young midshipman, who has only his pay and his first stripe in all the world, Henry Crawford, rich, smart and cultivated, feels the lack in himself and wishes that he too had made long voyages, seen, worked and suffered as much.

> "His heart was warm, and his fancy fired, and he felt the highest respect for a lad who before he was twenty had gone through such bodily hardships, and had given such proofs of mind. The glory of heroism, of usefulness, of exertion, of endurance, made his own habits of selfish indulgence appear in shameful contrast, and he wished that he had been a William Price, distinguishing himself and working his way to fortune and consequence with so much self-respect and happy ardour, instead of what he was."

English naval men ought not only to receive admiration on their personal merits. The whole nation owes the Navy so great a debt of gratitude that it could never be fully paid either in honours or in money.

When the ignorant Sir Walter Elliot complains that in the Navy—

> "Persons of obscure birth"

are brought

> "unto undue distinction, raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of."

his daughter Anne allows herself a protest in favour of the men whom Sir Walter is running down :—

> "The Navy, I think, who have done so much for us, have at least an equal claim with any other set of men for all the comforts and privileges which any home can give."

Jane Austen's appreciation and admiration of the patriotic and personal qualities of naval men must certainly owe something to fraternal affection, but her praises do not betray a foolish enthusiasm or blind partiality.

The rather melancholy and regretful opinions of Anne Elliot, in *Persuasion*, concerning Captain Harville and Captain Berwick, are of very different quality to the undiscriminating gush of Louisa Musgrove about sailors in general and those of her acquaintance in particular.

Anne notices with pleasure amongst the modest furniture at the Harvilles certain exotic trifles and curiosities :—

> "Which were more than amusing to Anne, connected as it all was with his profession, the fruit of its labours.
>
> "Anne thought she left great happiness behind her when she left the house, and Louisa, by whom she found herself walking, burst forth into raptures of admiration on the character of the Navy—their friendliness, their brotherliness, their openness, their uprightness."

Compared to William Price, Captain Harville and Captain Berwick, Fanny Price's father has something of the grossness of Smollett's sailors, though the outlines are softened and smudged over, of those sailors whose noisy joviality and conversations, well-peppered with blasphemy and obscenity, Smollett revelled in reproducing.

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In 1814, the line of Commodore Truman is not extinct, and the existence of Mr. Price, retired lieutenant of the Marines, demonstrates that for us.

> "He was more negligent of his family, his manners were worse, and his habits coarser than Fanny had been prepared for. He did not want abilities; but he had no curiosity and no information beyond his profession; he read only the newspaper and the Navy List; he talked only of the dockyard, the harbour, Spithead, and the Motherbank; he swore and drank, he was dirty and gross; she had never been able to recall anything approaching tenderness in his former treatment of herself. There had remained only a general impression of roughness and loudness, and now he scarcely ever noticed her but to make her the object of a coarse joke."

But a naval man of Mr. Price's type is unusual in Jane Austen's circle, and she does not linger over the details of the kind of coarseness which inspires in herself exactly the same repulsion which she attributes to Fanny Price.

The naval men on whom she likes to touch were men of good family, like her brothers, distinguished both in their manners and abilities, uniting the highest qualities of a gentleman with the intrepidity which permits them, if they have decent luck, to make a nice sum of money out of prize ships in seven years.

She puts the intelligent and untiring sympathy, always roused in her by the lives of those she loves, into her study of their characters and comprehension of their personality. One catches glimpses in the novels, of the fiery, red face of a Mr. Price, or the sarcastic smile of an Admiral Crawford, but one sees far more of young officers already ripened by experience, like Captain Wentworth, or proud of displaying their new uniforms, like William Price; and these characters certainly owe a great deal to Francis and Charles Austin and, is it not possible, to some brother-officer of theirs who was, perhaps, the hidden romance of her life.

Compared to the naval men, who have a special place apart in her picture of country life, remaining even in the rather dull surroundings of the country house or watering-place, wrapped in a radiant atmosphere of dangers braved and triumphs secured, peculiar to themselves, the clergyman, whether of town or village parishes, have a very flat existence of monotony.

To belong to the Navy was less of a profession to Jane Austen than a vocation—or rather, it is *the* profession and superior to all others, because, putting all personal considerations aside, it embodies courage and abnegation, which would be superfluous in any other profession.

As if to counterbalance her enthusiasm for the Navy, Jane Austen deals with the clergy on a very different note.

The Church is the profession adopted by young men of good family who are not drawn to any other, when they are assured by the position of their families or acquaintances of coming into a living which will maintain them in circumstances suitable to their birth.

Her praise of the Navy is all on a personal note, but her attitude to the clergy, on the contrary, is entirely that of a period and a whole class.

A clergyman's daughter herself, she expresses the opinion, which is also that of her relations and friends, that the profession of a clergyman is not in any way uplifted above any profession which a gentleman may carry on.

It is the personality of the clergyman which gives dignity to his office, just as it adds interest and value.

A clergyman may reduce his obligations, if so it pleases him, to a weekly service and a hasty reading of the ritual. He may be the pastor of a parish for one day in the week and reside in a different parish the other six days. But when he puts his heart into fulfilling his duties conscientiously he knows :—

> "That human nature needs more lessons than a weekly sermon can convey; and that if he does not live among his parishioners and prove himself by constant attention their well-wisher and friend he does very little either for their good or his own."

Several times over we come upon the opinion, so definitely expressed in *Mansfield Park*, that a clergyman should live among his parishioners.

It does not seem that anything much beyond that is demanded of him.

Only once, in *Emma*, we find a clergyman visiting poor people. And the Reverend Mr. Elton, meeting Emma and Harriet, who have come out to bring comforts to an invalid, turns to walk back with them, postponing until some other day the visit which has little importance in his eyes compared with the pleasure of taking a walk with the charming Emma.

Even when a clergyman does live in the midst of his flock, his spiritual influence is very much restricted.

In Jane Austen's novels he appears to us rather like another sort of squire, who, instead of superintending the cultivation of the land, watches, in the name of the higher classes, over farmhands and farmers to see that the duties of temperance, obedience and regularity in their lives are not forgotten.

Nearly all the lives of the clergy are spent among their equals—squires and people of good family.

When old, and lovers of good cheer, they played whist with the Squire of the parish, and prided themselves on offering a better dinner, more exquisitely served than was to be found on any other table in the neighbourhood, to guests selected from anongst the best people of the county.

If young and passably good-looking they aspired to the hand of an heiress, and the name of clergyman was the only thing which distinguished them from the other

young men who were invited to Mansfield Park by Lady Bertram, or from the fashionable dancing-men who thronged to the Bath assembly-rooms.

The religion which they preached to their parishioners and expected them to observe was devoid of any tinge of mysticism or other-worldliness. It is simply a morality and above all a social morality, a series of traditional rites, a discipline outwardly observed, which replaces virtue by propriety and charity by condescension.

How could this religion be other than it was when the sole qualifications demanded of a candidate for ordination were either that he should be the protégé of some person of position with livings to dispose of, or that he should be a member of a family with like privileges ?

A " gentleman " had no need to back up his cause by theological learning or zeal for the Established Church ; it was enough if he bore the name of one of the good families of the diocese, as is proved by the case of Benjamin Lefroy, who in 1814 married a niece of Miss Austen's, and in the course of his examination for ordination had to reply to the two following questions :

" Was he not the son of Mrs. Lefroy of Ash ? " and, " Had he not married a Miss Austen ? "

The clergy of Jane Austen's novels are infinitely superior in dignity of life, education and birth to the touching, or odious, or absolutely grotesque figures in clerical black, of Richardson's, Fielding's and Goldsmith's romances. They belong to a higher class than their predecessors of the former generation and through this fact alone are more independent characters.

Though not rich they can live in comfort which would have been luxury to a Parson Adams, a Trulliber, or a Square.

From the beginning of the eighteenth century, as the custom became established of reserving livings for

younger sons of good family, the clergyman ceased to be the humble parasite placed at the lower end of his patron's table. He was received as a guest and treated as an equal.

The Rev. Mr. Collins, who announces to his cousins that he will always manifest the most respectful gratitude towards Lady Catherine de Burgh, and will "always be ready to celebrate the rites of the Anglican Church" forgets in his folly that to abase himself thus is unnecessary and out of place and that his absurd deference before the noble lady excites the derision of all sensible people.

Whether he has obtained his living entirely by his patroness's intervention, or whether he has purchased from her his preferment and its emoluments and tithes, he is a "gentleman" and would do better to bear it in mind.

The evolution however which was to come about in the nineteenth century, which was to put a clergyman into the rank of a gentleman whatever his birth-status, was already giving indications of its approach. In *Emma* we see the Rev. Philip Elton, Rector of Highbury, admitted to the best society on account of his position, by people better-born than himself, who received him well.

But when he dares to aspire to Emma's hand, she makes him feel the gulf between them in spite of social appearances.

> "Perhaps it was not fair to expect him to feel how very much he was her inferior in talent, and all the elegancies of the mind. The very want of such equality might prevent his perception of it; but he must know that in fortune and consequence she was greatly his superior. He must know that the Woodhouses had been settled for several generations at Hartfield—the younger branch of a very ancient family, and that the Eltons were nobody. . . . The Woodhouses had long held a high place in the esteem of the neighbourhood,

which Mr. Elton had first entered about two years ago, to make his way as he could without any alliances but in trade, and without anything to recommend him to notice but his situation and his civility."

Notwithstanding the solemn declarations of Edmond Bertram and his father concerning the importance of clerical life, the current opinion of the day amongst the "gentry" is expressed in Miss Crawford's chaff.

Edmond is trying to explain to the girl why he accepts his destined career both willingly and joyfully. At first he thinks that Miss Crawford is blaming him for going into the Church simply as a profession which is in accordance with his rank; perhaps she regards the profession of a clergyman as a sort of Apostleship and disapproves of persons who look upon it as a means of livelihood?

Not at all. The only point is that Miss Crawford cannot understand any young man consenting to be a clergyman if he could be a soldier or a sailor.

"'A clergyman,' she added, 'is no doubt very sincere in preferring an income ready made to the trouble of working for one; and has the best intentions of doing nothing all the rest of his days but eat, drink and grow fat. It is indolence, Mr. Bertram, indeed—indolence and love of ease—a want of all laudable ambition, of taste for good company or of inclination to take the trouble of being agreeable which make men clergymen. A clergyman has nothing to do but to be slovenly and selfish—read the newspaper, watch the weather and quarrel with his wife. His curate does all the work and the business of his own life is to dine.'"

A lover of good living like Doctor Grant, ridiculous and a fool like Mr. Collins, swollen with vanity and pretentiousness like Mr. Elton, kind but inclined to sermonize and play the pedant like tiresome but excellent Edmond Bertram, the clergymen of Jane Austen's novels invariably have one characteristic in common; nothing alarms them so much as religious zeal.

They are too much the man of the world, or make

too much of a point of being taken for such, ever to mention religion outside the pulpit.

With that smiling contempt for fervour and emotion in religion which is the dominant characteristic of the Anglican deism of the eighteenth century; they leave living, vibrating faith, the sense of an unseen presence, of divine protection and inexhaustible mercy and infinite love to the enlightened ones—the fanatics, as the followers of Wesley and Whitefield appear in their eyes.

The Church for which they are ministers is nothing to them but one element of the social and political constitution of England. They believe that they have no other mission than to administer the sacrament to their parishioners and to set an example of patience and resignation to the poor. For the rest, they content themselves with life in a comfortable parsonage until they are raised to the higher dignities in the Church which fall to their lot.

The reawakening of religious fervour which, thanks to Methodism, has given new birth to faith among the humble among the working people, was to be observed even then in isolated examples of the Anglican clergy, but Evangelism had not really found admittance to the Established Church.

Several years were to pass before the fervour of the Methodists took hold of the vicarages under the name of the spirit of the Gospel, transformed the life of the clergy and endowed their teaching with an influence and a wide-spread power of which it had long been bereft.

A book which had enormous success during the first half of the nineteenth century, *The Fairchild Family*, published in 1818, provides precious evidence of the awakening of religious feeling which was operating between 1775 and 1815.

The contrast between the education which Mrs. Fairchild has received and the education that she gives

her children enables one to measure the distance between the last generation of the eighteenth century and the generation immediately after it, in everything concerning the importance of religion in life.

Several times during the course of the interminable history which unfolds to view the virtues and piety of the incomparable Fairchild family, the coldness and formality of the Anglican doctrines up to the beginning of the nineteenth century are opposed to real faith and fervent piety--which, by the way, were carried to a point which seems deplorable to-day—which had made the spirit of the gospel live again.

The characters of Jane Austen's novels on the contrary seem to know nothing of religious emotion, and the fact of belonging to the Established Church, of observing its rites, and participating in its Sacraments is of the same order of things as the observance of propriety in conduct.

In the world of Bertrams, Bennets, and Eltons, religion is always a political and social function, and its value lies in appearances.

For a clergyman it seems to consist in one sermon a week (whatever Sir Thomas Bertram may say), and, for his parishioners, in a weekly attendance at church to hear the sermon in question.

No one reads at Mansfield Park, Longbourne, or Hartfield. The aimless pursuits of the day do not leave time for it ; but on winter evenings the family will listen to a little Shakespeare, read aloud.

Catherine Morland is glad when it rains, so that she can stay indoors and read some such book as the *Mysteries of Udolpho* without being obliged to leave off at the most pathetic moment in the story. When Harriet Smith is struck by the desirability of a little culture, and of thought lifted above frivolous preoccupations, she opens a book of extracts and hunts for charades in verse.

Edmond Bertram finds Crabbe's *Tales* and the *Travels of Lord Macartney* on Fanny Price's dressing-table.

In matters of morality and conduct the "gentry" had recovered the unbending austerity of an earlier day.

Certain failings were not looked upon with the indulgent eye that town society, however, still accorded them.

The narrower circles of country life, composed of relations, allies and intimate friends, left no opening for toleration of irregular life in this little world of the squires. The Bennets' despair and indignation upon hearing of Lydia's freakish elopement illustrates the attitude of a society with a very strict moral code quite as clearly as the natural sorrow of parents at the dishonour of a daughter.

Lydia's lightness and rash behaviour are even regarded more from the point of view of their effect on society than from that of the family.

The adventure has to end in marriage before Jane or Elizabeth can forget the humiliation to themselves brought about by their sister's misbehaviour.

Maria's intrigue, once known, causes a scandal by which the two guilty ones are not the only sufferers.

It is not a case of an elopement with a girl, which was fairly frequent in the eighteenth century, and practically always ended in marriage.

Maria was the wife of Mr. Rushworth, and left her husband for the man she loved. Such an action, according as to whether it is judged from the Puritan point of view, just and wholesome in its rather exaggerated austerity, or by the easy moral outlook of society people, may be considered either a crime or a peccadillo.

For Sir Thomas there is no compromise between right and wrong, no middle way between conjugal fidelity and conjugal infidelity no possibility of ever

enjoying a good reputation again if once one has "lived in sin."

Like the Rev. Mr. Primrose, who sets out for London on learning of Olivia's flight, in order to prevent his daughter from "persevering in her sinfulness," Sir Thomas Bertram, on receiving the news of Maria's departure, leaves Mansfield to go and snatch the unfaithful wife away from "her sin and shame."

In his eyes the word "sin" has not preserved the theological severity of its meaning for Mr. Primrose thirty-five years earlier; but though he judges his daughter from the social and not the religious point of view, he does not judge any the less severely, rather more than less.

Miss Crawford defends Maria, for she lives in a world where, according to Mr. Price, a great many fair ladies throw their caps over windmills. She alludes to her brother's conduct as folly, and regrets that the "folly" should be "stamped by exposure."

Sir Thomas and his family, on the contrary, are indignant at this indulgent attitude.

> "'We must persuade Henry to marry her,' said Miss Crawford, 'and when once married and properly supported by her own family, people of respectability as they are, she may recover her footing in society to a certain degree. In some circles we know she would never be admitted, but with good dinners and large parties there will always be those who will be glad of her acquaintance.'"

This easy-going, worldly-wisdom of people who live in the world and do not take adventures of gallantry in the tragic manner, and whose morality consists in considering that the greatest sin is to be found out—or, at any rate, to make a public scandal—appeared to the Bertrams as—

> "Advocating acquiescence in sin."

Sir Thomas, even when his daughter has left Henry Crawford, will not have her at Mansfield Park :—

> "Not wishing to insult the families of the neighbourhood by imposing the sight of Maria upon them,"

nor

> "to give approbation and protection to immorality by softening the chastisement which it deserves."

If the morality and the usages of the aristocracy knows nothing of such severity, if the theories of Lord Chesterfield upon gallantry are those which inspire a Miss Crawford and her circle, the middle-classes, upper and lower, did not measure their estimation of a sin or failing by the rank of those who committed it.

At the period when Jane Austen was writing, and in the society which she studied, the change in moral outlook gave new force to the Puritan ideal and dignity and regularity of conduct.

He, or she (especially she), who infringed one of the laws on which society was based were to abandon hope of any indulgence from society. Sir Thomas Bertram does not stand alone in his condemnation of Maria.

The whole of the country gentry were with him in spurning any woman who had failed to maintain the honour and moral tradition of her class.

The morality preached by Richardson in the first half of the eighteenth century is seen to be realized and established, without effort, in the work of Jane Austen.

The virtue of a Clarissa and the worthiness of Sir Charles Grandison have become the average natural thing, in a Fanny Price, Elizabeth Bennet, Edmond Bertram, or Mr. Knightley.

Virtue is no longer mouthed about as that bundle of perfection, Sir Charles Grandison, mouthed about it ; they do something better than that at Highbury and Mansfield ; they practise it.

Restraint in language, politeness and temperance,

are seen to increase from one generation to another, just as the opinion of society on all matters of conduct developes in the direction of higher and higher morality, and greater regularity of life.

Sir John Middleton, in *Sense and Sensibility*, whose position, character and tastes recall those of Squire Western, in *Tom Jones*, would think himself debased by habits of drunkenness and gross language.

In Miss Burney's *Evelina*—which, however, dates from 1778—the only explanation that the young girl's ward can give her of a note couched in almost insulting terms, written by Lord Orville is that

> "Lord Orville must have been drunk when he wrote it."

In the same way the importunities and extravagant speeches with which Sir Clement Willoughby pesters Evelina owe some of their ardour to the same cause.

Evelina bemoans the idea that Lord Orville

> "Whom she believed a stranger to the very idea of intemperance,"

shares a failing common to the members of his world, when she would have liked to find this perfect gentleman superior to every weakness.

A passage in *Emma*—which was written in 1815—contains the only allusion in all Jane Austen's work, not to an example of intemperance but to the mere possibility of it.

While for Evelina and her ward it is a question of something regrettable no doubt, but natural after all—Emma Woodhouse supposes (quite gratuitously by the way) that Mr. Elton, whose attentions she detests :—

> "Has drunk rather too much of Mr. Weston's excellent wine, and she felt sure that he would want to be talking nonsense."

The ingenious Emma gives this explanation of the motive for Mr. Elton's attentiveness in order not to

concede that her own amiable welcome and encouragement have brought upon her the young parson's somewhat indiscreet attentions.

The naval men, the clergy, and the squires even, have obligations to fulfil, professional duties, or duties imposed by their position in life ; and in the novels of Jane Austen it is these men who represent the active element of effort and responsibility.

But the possession of a large fortune, free from the responsibilities—however light—which are inseparable from the position of lord of the manor gives certain members of county society greater freedom and independence than is enjoyed by Sir Thomas Bertram or Sir John Middleton.

A young man, like Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice*, who has just bought a place in some county is free to abandon his new domain and sell it again if he takes a fancy to do so.

A landowner whose family has lived on the same property for generations, on the contrary, feels a natural disinclination to confide his tenants and labourers to a new master, to say nothing of the depth of his feeling for the place itself, which has belonged to his family so long.

He is the overlord and, though his vassals owe him obedience, it behoves him equally to display watchful ownership.

Besides the fact that he would himself have it so, the opinion of what the country-side—that is, his family, the farmers and neighbouring squires—expect from him, is like an overmastering law which he dare not infringe without lowering himself in his own eyes At the same time he is warmly attached to the estate by all the bonds of habit, tradition and education.

He cannot be called an idler, for if he is not a Member of Parliament, he is a Justice of the Peace, and settles the disputes of the country-people.

But in contrast to these hereditary suzerains, if there should be a young man in the neighbourhood who has newly acquired an estate, which is managed by an agent, while he lives on the rents, he may fairly be called a member of the "idle rich."

> "Mr. Bingley inherited property to the amount of nearly a hundred thousand pounds from his father, who had intended to purchase an estate, but did not live to do it. Mr. Bingley intended it likewise, and sometimes made choice of his county . . . his sisters were very anxious for his having an estate of his own."

While he is still looking about for a property, and during the long years which must pass before he can become a real "squire," wrapped up entirely in the doings of the countryside which must henceforward be to him the centre of the world, a Bingley would be regarded rather in the light of a *dilettante* in country society.

In *Mansfield Park* two other types appear, somewhat resembling Bingley, with a very different social importance: the first of these is Tom Bertram, the eldest son of the baronet and his heir; and the fact of the future inheritance relieves the young man from all obligation to make a position in the world for himself. Edmond, the second son, has to go into the Church; but Tom, by virtue of his right of birth, is born to "spend without heed and to enjoy himself."

Then we have Henry Crawford, quite as much bent on a life of pleasure as Tom Bertram, but with more refinement in his choice of distractions, master of a fine fortune, and preferring the freer and more varied life of a bachelor about town to the monotonous existence of a country gentleman. He divides his time between the drawing-rooms of London and the Bath assembly-rooms, and departs into the shires for the hunting season, at which time he is sure to meet plenty of agreeable people of his own kind there.

It is not the least of our astonishments, in reading Jane Austen's novels, to discover what the social functions are like, and to admire, accustomed as we are to a totally different conception of life, even among the idle class, the fact that young men can be content with such simple amusements, and, what is more, can take evident pleasure in them.

It seems that each day is to furnish the country families with some pretext for meeting in the neighbourhood of little towns like Highbury or Mansfield.

In the morning, if no excursion has been arranged, people are sure to meet when out walking. Or they run in to eat strawberries in the garden just for the pleasure of seeing and chatting with their guests of the night before.

Walks, excursions and picnics for Tom Bertram, Frank Churchill, and Henry Crawford are so many occasions for flirting and for shining in conversation or in skilful driving on bad roads.

Under a sky which is often sullen and rainy, the young people come and go, always smiling and keen about everything, and quite resolved to enjoy every hour of a life which they conceive as a perpetual "game."

As we nearly always see them in female society, we never hear them converse otherwise than amiably and flippantly. It is a smiling and amenable atmosphere in which they live. The ordinary material cares common to most men do not trouble their serenity; and these young men of fashion, without serious occupation, and yet never bored, or wearisome either, seem to move in the enchanted setting of a *Fête Galante*, from which the sensual grace, melancholy and desire have been removed to give place to a joy in living which is wholesomer, perhaps, but is certainly less subtle.

Their good humour is never ruffled, unless someone dares to attempt to draw them into some amusement

which is not of their own choice. Then their offended self-love surges up : Tom Bertram, as all are agreed, is a perfect man of the world and a fine whist-player, but he has no intention of making a fourth in a very "serious" rubber which has been arranged in a corner of the drawing-room at Mansfield Park. He is also resolved not to dance that evening, and all his courtesy to his cousin Fanny will not impel him further than to say in a languid manner :—

"If you want to dance, Fanny, I will stand up with you."

Fanny answers that she does not want to in the least.

Mrs. Norris, seeing Tom engaged in looking carelessly at a newspaper, asks him to make a fourth at the whist-table.

"'I should be most happy,' cried he, jumping up with alacrity, 'it would give me the greatest pleasure, but that I am this moment going to dance. Come, Fanny,' taking her hand, 'do not be dawdling any longer, or the dance will be over.'

"Fanny was led off very willingly, though it was impossible for her to feel much gratitude towards her cousin, or distinguish, as he certainly did, between the selfishness of another person and his own."

Judging of life and men from an exclusively feminine point of view, Jane Austen only informs us as to the occupations of the squires and parsons, of enough to make us understand that if they are of an age to be lovers, they can be at liberty at any hour of the day to go to a picnic, or for a walk, or to a ball.

Rich and idle, like nearly all the men that she knows, these heroes seem to have no better aim in life than that of passing as much time as possible in company with the women they want to marry and who—unless Fate is very unkind—will certainly become their wives at the end of the story.

As the author always studies men at a moment when

feminine influence is at its height over them, when the field of their activities tends to be enclosed by the fencing which the woman of the period never passed beyond, we only see one aspect of the lovers, the light in which they appear to the heroine, whether she be Emma, Elizabeth, Anne or Fanny.

Mr. Darcy, one of the richest landowners of Derbyshire, Captain Wentworth, one of the heroes who has served under Nelson, Edmond Bertram, who during his terms at Oxford and also in London has obtained a wider experience than country life affords, all these men are judged less by their characters as individuals as by their possibilities as lovers and husbands.

In the domain of home life and in society where women queen it, men, however free elsewhere, must submit to the yoke of woman.

If in love, they must seek to be attractive, and—well Jane Austen knows it—they will only do this by consecrating themselves entirely to the service of the women they adore.

At the same time, these lovers are not so much studies of masculine psychology here as a subtle analysis of the points in men which attract women, which is very sincere, sometimes almost naïve, in its sincerity.

Masculine character, a lover's emotions are never profoundly observed ; yet this study is precious, for if it does not give us the men themselves, it shows us at least how they appeared in women's eyes.

These women whose lives were given up alternately to housekeeping and going to parties, who lived a narrow and monotonous life on country estates, had very little physical energy.

Could it be otherwise when Fashion imposed high satin boots and muslin tippets on young ladies? Above all they demanded of men the power to amuse them during their long hours of idleness, and escort

when they sauntered in some avenue of the park or went for a ride.

A man's real and sterling qualities counted as nothing, or almost nothing, beside such things as these.

That is why a fine young man, as he was, taken all round, like the thick-witted and simple Mr. Rushworth, is openly despised, while a fashionable young man, who talks well and reads Cowper in a voice charged with suitable emotion, is excused, almost justified; in his worst failings.

Perhaps the reason why the author has not succeeded in giving any unforgettable or striking individuality to her male characters is simply the fact of the great distance which separated the women's sphere of action from the men's, among the "gentry" at that period.

Knowing practically nothing real about the lives of men, how could she give us portraits of them as finely-studied and subtly-shaded as those of her heroines?

In order to create an Emma or an Elizabeth she had only to look around her—or perhaps into her looking-glass—to see the fresh, smiling and expressive face that she was in need of.

When she is making a study of a woman's character and wishes to assure herself of the correctness of the data supplied by her own experience, she has only to interrogate herself.

But when it is a question of depicting a Darcy, an Edmond Bertram, or a Willoughby, the difficulties are greater.

As she has no opportunities of observing men at her leisure she knows nothing of them but the society surface, and appears to have no intuition to supply the deficiency. She attempts to do this by her reading.

Her heroes, if not all frozen into a single attitude like Darcy, or very rapidly sketched in like Mr. Knightley and Captain Wentworth, are copied from

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models which were already classic at the time when she was writing: Willoughby, the attractive "black sheep," with whom Marianne Dashwood falls in love at first sight, is a blurred and softened reproduction of Lovelace, the unscrupulous lover, the libertine and seducer, created by Richardson.

But since Miss Austin seems to feel bound to avoid tragedy either in feeling or action, the passion and crime which in *Clarissa Harlowe* are expiated by the death of Lovelace, become in *Sense and Sensibility* pardonable peccadilloes for which Willoughby pays by marriage with a rich but "infernally jealous" woman.

Nothing that we see of Willoughby and his brilliant qualities at the beginning of the story; nor the long speech "for the defence," in which he attempts to justify his conduct at the end, succeeds in persuading us that the young man is really as irresistible and seductive as he appears in the inexperienced eyes of Marianne Dashwood.

Just as Willoughby leaves an indefinite impression on our minds, so does Wickham the "bad man" of *Pride and Prejudice* remain quite indistinct and confined to the background of the scene where Elizabeth and Darcy move, bathed in clear light.

In the later period of her work, however, Jane Austen gives us a really interesting study of a lover and seducer.

By one of those happy yet involuntary contradictions which occur in the work of genius, but less often with Jane Austen than any other novelist, she designed Henry Crawford to take the second place, and yet he insists on outshining the hero, and is certainly the most living and important masculine figure in the book.

Henry Crawford, on whose attitudes, gestures, looks, inflexions of voice, the author bestows as much care as she generally gives to her heroines, is a doubly

interesting figure; for he is the last example in English fiction of the man of the world as seducer.

He knows how to attract, without possessing a particle of the mysterious and fatal fascination of the Childe Harold, Manfred and Lara types, who are to carry all before them in the novel until the arrival of Charlotte Brontë with the hero of *Jane Eyre*, the fierce, unsociable Rochester in whom she created a new literary type, giving an irresistible power of fascination to intelligent ugliness and sheer physical strength.

Henry Crawford is an attainment of the paradox of a man who is irresistible without any of the characteristics of a hero of romance.

He is not remarkably good-looking, neither is he ugly, and there is something which takes him even further from the convention and nearer to reality, he is never unhappy.

He is simply a man of the world who appears to be cultivated, smart and witty, because we see him at Mansfield surrounded by "squires" like young Mr. Rushworth, or rather serious and formal youths like the excellent Edmond Bertram.

His superiority to the other men is concentrated in one quality—and Jane Austen gives us to understand that it is a great one—he likes the society of women and wants to be attractive to them.

> "'And how do you think I mean to amuse myself, Mary, on the days that I do not hunt?'
>
> "'To walk and ride with me, to be sure.'
>
> "'Not exactly. Though I shall be happy to do both, but that would be exercise only to my body, and I must take care of my mind. . . . No, my plan is to make Fanny Price in love with me. . . . I cannot be satisfied without Fanny Price, without making a small hole in Fanny Price's heart. . . . Never met with a girl who looked so grave on me. Her looks say, 'I will not like you, I am determined not to like you'; but I say she shall. . . . I will not do

her any harm, dear little soul! I only want her to look kindly on me, to give me smiles as well as blushes, to keep a chair for me by herself, wherever we are, and to be all animation when I take it and talk to her, to think as I think, be interested in all my possessions and pleasures, try to keep me longer at Mansfield, and feel when I go away that she will never be happy again. I want nothing more."

The attentions, flatteries and the delicate homage which Henry Crawford lavishes on a woman whom he wants to captivate, make no impression on the heart of the innocent Fanny, because the young girl has already given her love to Edmond Bertram.

But if Henry Crawford's thoughtless levity has no success with Fanny and cannot carry her away in a short time, perhaps, she would not have been able to resist him for long. And who could be surprised if he considered for a moment that the man to whom this delicious little girl has given her heart is presented to us as a pedagogue rather than a lover.

Edmond Bertram is a striking example of the insufficiency and insignificance of the lovers in Jane Austen's novels.

In drawing her heroines she bestows on them just those fascinating defects which have more to do with the individuality and attractiveness of a face than have its noticeably good features.

In the case of her men characters she dare not dispense with the most irreproachable and fastidious perfection.

It seems as if she had the image of the incomparable Sir Charles Grandison perpetually before her eyes.

Edmond Bertram is sensible, pleasing in face and figure; he is kind, generous and candid; but, even as with Richardson's heroes, his very good qualities become intolerable to us, for they positively exhale a killing tedium.

Mr. Knightley, whose serious and solid cast of

character shows off the vivacity, high spirits and charm of Emma so well, is rather like Edmond Bertram.

He, too, is a perfect gentleman, and would be as boring as Edmond if he had time to discuss at great length the principles of education, the duties of a clergyman, and the dangers of society life.

Jane Austen, who preferred Edmond Bertram and Mr. Knightley to all her other male characters, nevertheless declares them :—

"Inferior to what a gentleman can be and very often is."

Inferior they are, but not in the sense that the author intends.

Their inferiority is due to their incomplete participation in life—that is, inactivity.

They have only a one-sided connection with reality ; they are not real all round like the heroines whose youth, gaiety and charm spreads radiance through *Pride and Prejudice, Emma,* and *Mansfield Park.*

In spite of their solid virtues, their indisputable moral worth, these lovers are not live men. What they lack, what the inexperience of the authoress has rendered her powerless to give them, are the inevitable faults and failings mixed with their perfections which reduce men to the common measure of flesh and blood.

That part of English society which is depicted in Jane Austen's novels seems to the modern reader a thing so much of the past that there is hardly a trace of it left to-day.

Faithful as one feels the portrait to be, in spite of its undeniable sincerity, the heroes of Jane Austen and their world appear, after the passing of a century, so far withdrawn from life into fiction that they almost seem to belong to the land of the Sleeping Beauty. This impression of the unreal produced by an undoubted work of realism opens up a series of questions in our minds difficult to answer perhaps, but worth formulating.

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Have these country gentlefolk of Jane Austen so far removed from us to-day, really undergone so profound a change in a hundred years?

What superficial and what radical alterations have come about to account for the fact that a study of manners at the beginning of the nineteenth century no longer corresponds in the least with reality?

Why do these men and women, witty and charming as they are, who are as true to life as they are individual, yet seem to us to move in an atmosphere entirely strange to us?

Finally—why do these beings, whose thoughts and actions conform not only to the custom and convention of their period, but to the great moral laws which reign over activity and the relations of men in all time—yet seem to us—a little *outside*—not above or below—these same laws?

The differences between English provincial society as it is to-day and as presented by Jane Austen do not depend on outward modifications alone.

In the English countryside to-day you may still see the same embowered parsonages, peaceful and isolated, the same old houses with a Norman keep which might be called Mansfield Park or Kellynch Hall or Longbourne.

In our day, as then, the sense of a hierarchy persists among the inhabitants of these sumptuous old places full of English comfort; only the designation of the inhabitants has changed—the "gentry" of the seventeenth and eighteenth century have become "the county."

The "county" keeps the same position between the aristocracy and the lower middle-classes, the tradespeople and small denizens of the country towns.

But beneath the surface a spiritual change has been affected which alters all the moral values. Just as

Lamb placed the society of seventeenth-century comedy of manners outside the pale of reality—beyond the frontiers of good and evil, so we do likewise with Jane Austen's world to-day, and for similar reasons that Lamb had recourse to in his judgment of the works of Congreve and Wycherley.

The fashionable rakes and frail coquettes of the Restoration dramatists are isolated from the rest of the world and know nothing which relates to anything outside their intrigues, pleasures and adventures of gallantry.

In the same way Jane Austen's heroes, who are honourable men—gentlemen, conscientious clergymen, faithful husbands and benevolent masters—move in a special atmosphere, a light peculiarly their own is shed upon them. They inhabit an England which belongs only to themselves.

Their universe is different to ours less by superficial peculiarities of custom and habit or by the deeper divergences of education as by their conception of society and the necessities of social life.

The gentlefolk of Mansfield Park or Kellynch Hall, shut up within their egoism and their prejudices of caste, have souls which we can no longer understand.

They are happy and fortunate, and take their good fortune as their due, and accept without demur, without "useless repining," the fact of the necessitous lives around them.

Their serenity, their infinite contentment with themselves and their lives, separates them, by a great distance, from ourselves, who have learned that which their common-sense outlook had not then even suspected—for we have learnt the need for social justice and the brotherhood of mankind.